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The New Woman's Home, excerpt from Building Culture: Ernst May and the New Frankfurt Initiative, 1926-1931

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The New Woman’s Home
Kitchens, Laundries, Furnishings

These days many teachers, doctors, lawyers, merchants and others find it necessary to go without household help, and do their housekeeping and child-rearing themselves. . . . In a large house, the housewife becomes a slave to her work and is mortally crushed under a load of repetitive tasks. Who is unaware of the housewife’s lament that she hasn’t time to read a book, make music or in other ways be mentally active? To keep our people from becoming increasingly shallow, we must change. . . . Every bit of formalism and superficiality, social propriety and the like, which flowed along with the slow tempo of life in our grandmothers’ time, we now only endure; it is not of our time. We must work with haste to achieve a sound solution, to fulfill the imperatives of our spiritual lives.¹

—Ernst May, 1924

Established and active in the world and in the family, she can make her husband completely at home. From her own rich sphere of influence, there grows in her a clear understanding of his aspirations, his struggles and his work. She stands by his side no longer as a faithful and solicitous handmaid, but rather as the warmly committed guardian of his ideals, as a companion in his struggles, as a comrade in his efforts and his exertions, giving and receiving intellectual and moral support.²

—Clara Zetkin

In the standardized and flat-roofed houses of Praunheim and Römerstadt, women discovered that their sphere had also been reconfigured; delivered up replete with rationalized furniture, and rationalized kitchens and laundries. The kitchen was now the housewife’s “professional office,” the most sophisticated part of the house, its most publicized and most noticed aspect, beyond the flat roof. (Figure 3.01) The transformation of its technology depended, in turn, on the availability and
affordability of utility services providing gas and electricity to residential neighborhoods. The kitchen was also at the heart of the idea of nuclear family life: newly efficient, it enabled the wife and mother to lighten her housekeeping burden. Her role as nurturer now went beyond that of food provider to spiritual councilor. This rarefied status was a promise of a social policy called “female redomestication.”

There was little interest in issues of women’s equality among polite German society in the years between 1890 and 1918; this was a battle waged within the political parties of the working-class, where party women called for recognition. Working-class women had fought for their men. They were a significant force
in the anti-war movement, they joined demonstrations, gave speeches, created disturbances in food lines, and organized trade unions in munitions factories. Still, their comrades held steadfast in their belief in a “helpmeet” role for women. It was only under pressure from those like Clara Zetkin, the leader of the women’s branch of the SDP and Communist Rosa Luxembourg, that their reluctant parties adopted rights-for-women provisions. SDP women achieved a limited plank of separate-but-equal spheres before the war’s end. When the Social Democrats assumed power in 1918, the party fulfilled its political promise to enfranchise women, driven more from embarrassment than conviction. The Weimar Constitution declared women to be the equals of men and granted them the vote. Women quickly achieved a presence in state institutions and elective offices.

With constitutional guarantees in place, the revolutionary phase of the women’s movement was soon at an end. There followed years of retrenchment and decline. Young women increasingly viewed political activism as passé, and recruitment to the ranks of feminists fell, as did the number of women holding public office in the working class parties. In 1919, the SDP, USDP, and KP women numbered forty-eight among the three-hundred and fifty-member Frankfurt city council. As the decade wore on, the numbers of conservative women on the council grew, even as the overall number of women members dwindled, to thirty-three in 1929, and twenty-three in 1933.

Meanwhile, the younger generation became acolytes of an alternative idea of womanhood, one enabled by independence and freedom from traditional roles. The term “New Woman,” coined in the nineteenth century, resurfaced in the 1920s as women matched the rising cult of modernity and their freedoms with a model of their own making. This modern woman was reflected in advertisements and American films in images of woman as a sexually- and socially-liberated free spirit. Her most visible manifestation was in her style: her short hair, her scanty and “unfeminine” dress. While the breezy lifestyle of the New Woman had a marginal reality at best, as a fantasy it resonated among many young working women who evinced little interest in having a family, scant enthusiasm for homemaking, and extended their single years beyond the traditional leave-taking from home. When Frankfurt education reformer, Wilhelm Dienstbach, initiated weekly evening classes for poor women looking to improve their job skills, he was flooded with applicants.

The independence and fashionable style assumed by the New Woman was an anathema to the self-appointed conservators of the home. Socialists and conservatives alike feared for the future of family life, predicting a decline in the moral
fabric, and the emergence of a new, unruly working-class born under her tutelage, ending in Germany’s economic and spiritual ruin. Demographic trends underscored their fears. Women comprised 35 percent of the Weimar workforce. While post-war male unemployment was high, there was a rapid increase in the number of working women—many of them replacing men as a result of the rationalization of industry, as unskilled, low-wage labor. There was also a rising number women in the professions and the universities. By 1917, university women outnumbered men by 2.5 million. At the same time, a so-called “birth strike” retarded population growth among the working class. Experts blamed the dramatic drop in the birth rate—down to 3.9 births per household by 1925—on women’s selfish preoccupation with acquiring material comforts to the detriment of the family.

Ever ambivalent about its commitments to women, the SDP felt pressure to reassert the concept of woman’s sphere. Industry had a need for women as cheap labor, but it also needed them to produce a new generation of workers. Long hours on the job, added to responsibilities at home, had resulted in a much higher mortality rate for young women as compared to men. The strain was at least partially to blame for the drop in the birth rate, and put industry in need of a way to maintain its double and contradictory agenda for women. Meanwhile, the middle class bemoaned the declining number of women available to work as servants: with growing opportunities in industry, few working girls were attracted to the grueling routine, poor working conditions, and paltry benefits of home service. As early as the 1890s, there was an effort to establish a compulsory “Weibliches Dienstjahr” (woman’s service year) that would parallel men’s compulsory military service. Advocates suggested that the service year would acculturate working-class girls, shape them as servants and future housewives. Girls could “train” by working as farm maids, mother’s helpers or housemaids for little to no wages. The future outlined by the service year—that women prepare for lives as servile and menial laborers—was grim at best, yet the proposal resurfaced in the 1920s. and would eventually be instituted by the Fascists. In the meantime, its proponents found compensation in the institution of compulsory home economics training in the grammar schools, and the advent of the Frauenenschulen, vocational secondary schools that trained women as “professionals” for service industries as seamstresses, laundresses, daycare, and nursery-school attendants and nurses. At the same time, women’s college programs during Weimar reverted to an almost exclusive concentration on social service professions, i.e., domestic science, teaching, social work, and nursing.
This combination of factors—the veiled misogyny of the New Woman scare, the interests of industry and the middle class, constitutional promises, and the conflicted agenda of the SDP—resulted in the policy of female redomestication. With it, effort to improve the lot of German women quickly narrowed focus. Rather than striving to apportion women the same “basic duties and rights” as men, redomestication sought to reassert a “professionalized” woman’s sphere.

Female Redomestication and the Kitchen

On March 31, 1926, Social Democratic city councilor Elsa Bauer moved that all elements necessary to the rationalization of housework be built into public housing. The motion was passed.

—Minutes, Frankfurt City Council, 1926

The modernization of the home was vital to redomestication. For the working woman, homemaking was only one of two jobs she had to manage, and there was little possibility of household help—from either servants or family members—in an industrializing economy. The government and women’s organizations promised that modernizing the household would ease these burdens. The household would become a “professional workplace” that would free the housewife for more meaningful endeavors, nurturing her spiritual and intellectual life, and making for happier and better wives and mothers. While propaganda characterized jobs outside the home as simply work, marriage was now spoken of as “fulfilling,” and homemaking as a profession. Such arguments fared best among middle-class women, proving problematic in working-class households, where husbands were not themselves professionals.

Redomestication was jointly undertaken by federal research agencies and a newly-invigorated women’s movement. It was pursued by persuasion and legal force, and on multiple fronts: through education and political action, by social organizations and welfare agencies, and, guided by the principles of scientific management and the assembly line, designers and reformers reshaped the household itself. In 1927, the board of the Rfg—including Lüders, May, and Gropius—created the Department of Household Economy (Hauswirtschaft) “in recognition of the significance that the household has for the economy as a whole.” Lüders spearheaded this study of household professionalization, advocating a complete rethinking of the household “in a manner conforming to health, morals, and culture.” The division was to bring together housewives’ organizations, unions, consumer cooperatives, industry, skilled labor, as well as businesses, architects, and schools, to form a consumer research organization. Its job
was to study household labor, and the optimum means and methods to achieve it. It was to build an archive of research material—books, women’s magazines, and newspapers, and pursue research—for example, on cleanable floor surfaces, and practical kitchen arrangements. A special team would study the question of the working-class kitchen. Above all, the department would investigate and prove the efficacy of new practices over those born of intuition, and tradition. The end product would be quantifiable and measurable: an increase in productivity and less “wasted effort” resulting in stable home life, contented husbands, and more and healthier children. Middle class women would pursue housework with ease and grace, while working women could maintain two jobs with dexterity.

The American example of household reform was of seminal importance. Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *The American Woman’s Home* (1869) first introduced the idea that mechanized production was the model for the professionalization of housework. In their pursuit of the “Christian Household,” they urged women to economize time, labor, space, and expense “so as to secure health, thrift, and domestic happiness to persons of limited means.” Christine Frederick, an exemplary “professional housewife,” urged the message in her *Household Engineering: Scientific Management in the Home* (1919) to become the torchbearer and official founder of “domestic science.” Frederick attached to homemaking a new, worldly imagery.

I . . . really liked house work . . . . But now it was a daily struggle to “get ahead” of household drudgery. . . . Just about this time my husband’s work brought him in touch with the new movement called “scientific management,” and he came home with glowing accounts of what it was accomplishing in the various shops, offices and factories. . . . In fact, he and his friends talked of nothing but this new “efficiency idea.” Because I had an intuition that, perhaps, in this new idea was the life preserver for which I had been so earnestly searching in my own problem, I listened eagerly to their discussion.

Using time charts, meal plans, and inventories women would become plant managers as Frederick rearmed the kitchen in the likeness of a factory workstation. Like Beecher and Stowe, Frederick supported the suburban model of family life and a separate sphere for women. Her further contribution was to attach the heroic themes of modernization to homemaking. Her pervasive influence in Germany was assured with Irene Witte’s translation of *Household Engineering* in 1922. In Germany, the *Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine* (Federation of German Women’s Clubs; BDF) was an organization with a liberal and activist past. By the 1920s, it was also the nation’s largest women’s association, numbering over 6,000.
groups and over one million women. But with a new, inclusive policy that opened its membership to women's groups either neutral or actively opposed to feminism, the majority now consisted of socially and politically conservative organizations. The Reichsverband Deutscher Hausfrauenvereine (National Union of German Housewife Associations; RDH), founded by women concerned with the servant problem, in itself comprised half its member organizations. In this guise, the BDF became the major force in the national redomestication campaign and the propagation of “Mütterliche Politik” (“motherhood policy”). Its power rested on its alliance with professionals in government offices, where, principally through marriage, it had influential ties, and membership on national and industrial advisory boards. Together the state and the BDF collaborated on the formation of a new federal educational policy for women. In the primary schools, their curricular reforms focused on establishing compulsory home economics courses. Although Weimar schools were remarkable for their progressive innovations, the rise of the BDF spelled an era of retrenchment in women's education.

The RDH, meanwhile, assumed the legal status of a professional association; its expertise was housewifery. Collaborating with the Rfg and the National Bureau of Standards, it produced literature, exhibitions, and conferences, and, in some cases, products. Perhaps the most significant exhibition was Heim und Technik (Home and Technology) held in Leipzig in 1926 and in Munich in 1928. Celebrating the tenth anniversary of the merging of the RDH and BDF, the show demonstrated ways to free the housewife from drudgery through technical means. Along with a display of consumer products and appliances, there was a series of model kitchens, the designs of which addressed convenient layouts, and “professionally”-detailed kitchen equipment and displayed dishes and utensils representing the joint work of RDH and the NDI. Another Rfg exhibition, Die Ernährung (Nutrition), produced a special edition of Rfg Mitteilungen (News), subtitled Die Küche. Der Klein- und Mittelwohnung (The Kitchen of the Working- and Middle-Class House). Articles ranged from the particulars of kitchen design, to a general exhortation on the virtues of the modern kitchen and its relationship to Christian morality.

The collaboration between women's groups and the design professions played an important legitimating function for Mütterliche Politik. BDF groups supported the image of woman's sphere as it had begun to appear in design journals, and shared in instructing the female lay public in “better living practices.” Architects touted the role played by women's groups in their work, while these women “experts” chided lay women to recognize their ignorance of modern techniques.
and to accept what the designers had developed with them in mind. Passages such as the following were common in journals like *Die Küche (The Kitchen)*, and *Die Frau (The Woman)*:

*The architects need to educate the housewife in how to use the space and in why the small kitchen works, . . . that there is only one purpose for the room.... Most people do not know how to furnish them . . . the housewife must also be educated in taste.*

*Many criticized its [the Rfg’s] model kitchen’s small spaces . . . but it is to be hoped that the housewife will not reject it simply because it is unfamiliar.*

Responding to such specific objections as constrained space, the “expert, non-professionals” called upon women to “readjust their demands.” On the floor of the Frankfurt city council, Elsa Bauer argued for modern amenities in all new housing to ease women’s housekeeping burdens. Marie Bittorf (SDP), former maid, cofounder of the Maids’ Association, and one of the first female city council members, lobbied for girls to have professional equipment in the schools. Conservatives Christine Lill and Henny Pleimes, meanwhile, argued for more nursery schools. The most influential among the female experts was Marie-Elisabeth Lüders. On the national stage, Lüders was perhaps most instrumental in bringing such platforms to fruition. Erna Meyer was the another important semi-official spokesperson on women’s sphere. A professional housewife like Frederick and a prolific writer, Meyer wrote extensively on new household equipment and furnishings, and insisted on the importance of collaboration between architects and housewives to develop good products.

*Whether she is a Cinderella or a bad-tempered hysteric, . . . or one who masters her tasks with a steady hand and happy eyes and is aware of her own worth, . . . whether she is the slave to her plight or its creative master . . . the house makes a vast difference for her, her family and therefore for society as a whole. . . . Before anywhere else change must occur here, and the way there lies clear enough before us if we will only see it! Systematic collaboration between architect and the housewife must determine the solution.*

Her book, *Der neue Haushalt* (1926), went into twenty-nine editions in two years and was read widely by architects and the lay public. In 1927, she curated the household section of the Werkbund Exhibition in Stuttgart, *Siedlung und Wohnungen (Settlement and Housing)*, which included a range of kitchen models, some by Lihotzky and two on which Meyer herself collaborated. The work of women like Lüders and Meyer, emerging from nineteenth century philanthropic reform work by upper middle-class women, gave credibility to redomestication as
a feminist program. Through the Rfg, the RDH, and the BDF, they took an active role in shaping social policy, and gave evidence to the notion that women were themselves creating the world best suited for them, from the base of their intimate experiential knowledge, and that this process promised to fulfill the egalitarian social contract of Weimar for women.

In 1922, architects were galvanized by a German edition of Frederick’s *Household Engineering*. The book spawned a flood of similar works authored by designers: Bruno Taut’s *Die neue Wohnung: Die Frau als Schöpferin* (*The New House: The Woman as Creator*), Grete and Walter Dexel’s *Das Wohnhaus von Heute* (*The Dwelling of Tomorrow*), and Ludwig Neundörfer’s *So wollen wir wohnen* (*This is How We Want to Live*). As Frederick herself had recognized, the advent of rationalization offered an important opportunity for would-be modernizers of the household. With the improved economy, the prospects for mass-produced housing, house wares, and furnishings beckoned designers towards the reconfiguration of domestic culture and the household sphere. The result was the emergence of woman’s sphere as a consumer market, and the erosion of a tradition of female expertise in favor of the scientific and modern; a subjective and private realm was rethought as an objective, technological problem. How Frankfurt women took to the experts is not clear; one only rarely hears their voice. In 1929, the women’s club of Römerstadt wrote to the magistrate that they would like to have one of their members act as an advisor to those in charge of implementing the “electric household,” discreetly suggesting that professionals might find the opinions of the “practical housewife” of some value.

Kaufmann’s team at the Division of Standardization—Kramer, Lihotzky, Schuster and Brenner—set to work addressing design problems from the kitchen to household products and appliances, from home economics classrooms to public laundries. They studied psychology, material and product evaluations and scientific management principles as applied to housework, and pored over every fitting and material to produce efficient and content housewives: color brightened the housewife’s world, making housework more tolerable; enameled surfaces made for easy cleaning; furniture with smooth lines eliminated dusting in hard-to-reach places. May averred that he hired a woman (Lihotzky) to design the kitchen, because “a woman . . . understands household questions better than a man.” But, she was the exception. While in *DNF* women and children form text and subtext of the New Life narrative, they are quietly settled in the background in its making. In the same way, women activists played a persistent role in redesigning the kitchen as the housewife’s “office,” but were bit players in the larger project
of the household and the settlement. For the great part, it was men who professionalized the house, shaping its substance, arrangement, furnishings, and technology, and, in doing so, set the routines and practices of everyday home life.

In 1921, in multi-family housing for miners, May had produced his first kitchen niche. He described it in terms of a Taylorized workstation operated by one woman in a stationary position with all the appropriate utensils within an arm’s reach. (Figure 3.02) Its small dimensions consolidated space and saved on materials, water and gas lines. There were many such examples from earlier in the century, kitchen niches designed by men as diverse as Unwin, Tessenow and Loos. May’s differed from most others in the precision with which he developed its characteristic features—separation from circulation, the carefully-positioned tool racks, worktables and lighting that maximized convenience and obviated extra movement. He calculated the lost time of superfluous steps back and forth across the room in a traditional Wohnküche—the traditional kitchen where household chores, cooking, and family gatherings all took place—and reported that in a year’s time the housewife lost twenty to twenty-five minutes; in thirty years, six months were “squandered.” His attention to hygiene was also thorough. He covered exposed surfaces in impenetrable materials that were waterproof and required no polish. The corners between the floor and wainscots were rounded to ease cleaning, and the dropped ceiling, skirting walls, and ventilators kept cooking fumes from spreading into living areas.

May’s design reflected the influence of the young Grete Lihotzky. When he had visited the housing settlements in Vienna in 1921, Loos appointed Lihotzky to be May’s guide. She later recounted that May and his wife seemed provincial, a “very German” pair. Lihotzky impressed May with her discussion of the work being done in household rationalization. After returning to Breslau, he invited her to submit her work in Schlesisches Heim. In the debut article of her career, she published a modular kitchen, factory-assembled, and installed on site using a crane. In her second article, she presented a design for a cottage kitchen, its stove, sink, and countertop made as a single concrete component. The following year, she...
produced an all-concrete kitchen that had concrete cupboard frames and counter tops, enameled metal cupboard doors, and walls covered in sheets of black glass. It won a bronze medal at the Austrian Siedlungs-Wohnungs- und Baugilde for “the particular interest it sparked.” At the same exhibition, she showed a metal kitchenette intended for studio apartments. In 1925, May asked Lihotzky to join his team in Frankfurt. The potential to realize her more revolutionary ideas for mass production and modern materials was palpable.

Grete Lihotzky and the Frankfurt Kitchen

... I was part of a group that stood up for certain principles and architectural ideas, and fought for them uncompromisingly.
—Grete Lihotzky

The only woman architect on May’s design team, Grete Lihotzky gained international recognition for the Frankfurt Kitchen. She was an inspiring figure. A social activist since her student days, Lihotzky dedicated her professional life to the betterment of the working classes. She studied architecture during the war, against the advice of her teachers, and was the first woman graduate in her atelier. Her mentor was Oscar Strnad, instructor at Vienna’s Kunstgewerbeschule (Vienna Arts and Crafts School, now the Akademie für angewandte Kunst (Academy of Applied Arts). Strnad encouraged Lihotzky’s social activism. “He said one must first know how people live before designing houses for them... ‘Before you even draw a line, go out into the worker areas and see for yourself how the workers really live.’” Lihotzky indeed visited Viennese tenements and witnessed the frightful conditions. She observed Tessenow designing Siedlung Hellerau, for which he interviewed prospective tenants as to their household needs. It was a kind of participatory design technique that she would employ in her own work.

In 1919, travelling as an aid on an Austrian Kindertransport to the Netherlands, she visited the great housing estates by Berlage, de Klerk, Dudok, and Oud. The next year, on September 26, she and Loos were among the 50,000 demonstrators in Vienna’s Rathaus Square, demanding settlements for the homeless. Loos was one of the speakers. Lihotzky characterized him as the only architect “who had grasped the idea, the importance of the settlement movement.” When he assumed the leadership of a division of the Vienna Housing Office that year, he included Lihotzky on his team. From 1920 to 1925, she performed a full gamut of tasks—designing settlement blocks, model unit types, and, already at this early date, modular kitchens.
Upon her arrival in Frankfurt in 1925, Lihotzky took a post in Kaufmann’s division, where she devoted much of her time to kitchen design. She and her co-workers designed several versions of the modern kitchen for installation in the new settlements, though only her kitchen niche would be dubbed the “Frankfurt kitchen.” It was the standard model, fully operable by one woman, an efficient working station, and her “professional office.” The Frankfurt Kitchen was one of the most acclaimed creations of Weimar housing programs. In its gleaming metal surfaces, its high imageability, the specificity of its interlocking parts, its modular totality and largesse of technical fittings, it was the realization of the kitchen as machine. Its dimensions, 1.9m × 3.44m, were “scientifically” calculated to optimize every movement and coordinate every operation. Continuous counter space encircled the housewife; at the short end of the room was the cutting board fitted with its own small waste bin, and directly lit by a window; fronted by a swivel stool. To the left, was the garbage chute. Dishes were emptied, washed, and stored in one continuous motion as the housewife moved from the waste bin to the sink to the wooden plate holder above or the dish drainer to the right. A row of hooks put an array of special tools to hand; to the side eighteen labeled metal drawers stored flours and other dry goods, designed and produced by the Frankfurt manufacturer Haarer. Lihotzky said of this total design:

\[\ldots\] the kitchen had to be fully equipped so that the tenants couldn’t fill it with rural kitchen furniture. I argued that in this way one could save many square meters of space. The whole kitchen with equipment was cheaper than if we built a larger kitchen. May had to argue this point with the Frankfurt magistrate. It was a real battle.\[\ldots\]

The kitchen offered a remarkable array of equipment. Women who saw it at the Werkbund Exhibition in 1927, at the Rathaus, or in touring Römerstadt, marveled at the “electric helper” (a slow-cooker). Social and political critics, on the other hand, wondered how public housing could be afforded with such luxuries. The Frankfurt kitchen came with an electric or gas stove, a hot water heater,
electric light, and a built-in ironing board, rarities in working and even middle-class homes. But the advantages were considerable: there was no more need to fetch fuel—one of the most laborious of tasks and a dirty one; no need to nurse a fire or heat water on the stove, no need to tend gas light fixtures. Too, the equipment allowed the number of necessary utensils and the size of stoves and ovens be reduced, making for a smaller kitchen overall.58

The kitchen’s layout left a square of open circulation space in the center and adjacent to a sliding door leading to the living room.59 As the housewife moved the meal to the table, her ambulatory movements were neatly confined to this small area. (Figures 3.03–04) Light from the end window filled this cube of space, which Lihotzky kept free of overhead cabinets to enhance a feeling of spaciousness.60 The cube as a modular ordering device was an inheritance from Loos; here her arrangement in plan and section recalls Loos’s American Bar. She also experimented with new materials and simple, strong colors. In both the kitchen and the bath, a machine quality resonated in gleaming surfaces of tile, glass, and porcelain. The white of the plaster fabric on the walls and the ventilator hood reflected the light, while the aluminum sink, its splash tiles, and the aluminum storage bins were metal gray. The linoleum work surfaces, the stove top, and the tile floor were black, and the enameled cabinet fronts were a deep blue, a color that Lihotzky understood repelled flies.61

Other advantages argued for the niche were that it enhanced household hygiene, keeping the living space free of cooking odors, steam, noise, and equipment.

*The division of the kitchen into cooking and living zones protects the quiet space, where the family gathers after a day’s work or meal time, from the housewife’s work area . . . [In the*
To ensure calm and a respite for the husband from the outside world, household labor was contained and out-of-sight, as it would have been in the households of any well-to-do family.

One reason for the unique power of Lihotzky’s design was its invocation of the machine, a Type in the language of the NDI. She conceived it as an appliance in itself, a pre-fabricated product: its several major components were factory-assembled modules delivered to a building site and lifted into place by crane. Ten thousand were installed in the Frankfurt settlements; individual units were sold commercially, and it was advertised alongside chairs and lamps in the Frankfurt Register. In contrast, J.J.P. Oud’s collaboration at the Weissenhof Siedlung, or Georg Muche and Adolf Meyer’s kitchen at Haus am Horn seemed fragmentary and unresolved. Lihotzky’s models for the Frankfurt Kitchen issued from points far removed woman’s sphere. From the world of industry and the machine: ship galleys, the railroad dining car kitchen, and the lunch wagon—commercial kitchens that embodied a meals-per-minute equation—served as models for her design. With Lihotzky, the kitchen came to maturity as a piece of highly specialized equipment—a work station where all implements were a simple extension of the operator’s hand, one based solely on considerations of productivity and efficiency.

This ongoing commodification of household culture was both urged and embraced at the Hochbauamt. In designing the Frankfurt Kitchen, Lihotzky actively courted industry. The kitchen incorporated the products of a range of

Figure 3.05 Ad for the Prometheus hot water heater, highlighting Römerstadt.
local manufacturers: cabinetry by Georg Grumbach and Haarer, a Prometheus stove and water heater. Lihotzky wrote, “It is especially gratifying to see how in tune industry is with the practical concerns of housewives.” The manufacturers ran prominent ads in DNF. Then, too, the BDF could claim a role. At its Heim und Technik exhibition, the Housewives Commission claimed its role as the research underwriter of the Frankfurt Kitchen and Haarer’s cabinets.

In 1927, the Hochbauamt produced a documentary film called Die Frankfurter Küche (The Frankfurt Kitchen). The short film hailed the advantages of the Frankfurt Kitchen, demonstrated its proper use and technical features. Scenes alternated between a country kitchen—showing a woman dressed and coiffed in an old-fashioned manner, cutting kindling, emptying the stoves of ash, lighting the fire—and the new kitchen, where a young, modish woman lights the stove with a flick of a switch. The film pointed out that things in the old kitchen were too far apart and its surfaces hard to clean, a situation wonderfully illustrated by the old-fashioned Kochkiste, an upholstered chest, insulated with blankets, in which a heated casserole could be placed to complete cooking. (Figure 3.06) Lihotzky’s kitchen had a metal one that slipped into a sleeve in the stove itself. The subtitle neatly concluded, “the old kitchen meant power and time. The new kitchen saves both.”

The kitchens came in various models. Most were versions of Lihotzky’s Frankfurt Kitchen including ones for middle-class families with one or two servants—these were first built at Höhenblick. For exhibition, Lihotzky elaborated five versions. At the 1927 exhibit, Die neuzeitliche Haushalt (The Modern Household), she displayed a two-servant kitchen, comprising no less than three separate niches, an “office,” a preparation room. The variations that found their way into the settlements also included models by other designers. Schuster’s kitchen niche and Brenner’s foldout kitchen, for example, were designed for minimal dwellings, and installed in Praunheim and Römerstadt apartments. (Figures 3.07–08)

It was at the Die neuzeitliche Haushalt exhibit that the Frankfurt Kitchen first gained international recognition. In 1928, the French Labor Minister Loucheur proposed to purchase as many as 200,000 for his housing program; at the Stockholm exhibition of Weimar housing, it was such a critical success that within the
year a Swedish version was put into production. In the Soviet Union, Ginzburg and his “Committee for the Construction of the USSR,” or Stroikum, based their 1928 kitchen prototypes on Lihotzky’s work. Soon, any professional critique of kitchen design in Germany was obliged to include it. Sociologist Ludwig Neundörfer discussed it in his professionally popular book, *So wollen wir wohnen*. Reviews were generally admiring but even advocates of professionalization regretted that its small dimensions precluded two people working together, and the spaces were so highly determined. Indeed, Erna Meyer said plainly that the Frankfurt Kitchen left too little to chance. Certainly, such an intensively predetermined scheme must rely heavily on the good will of the architect in working with housewives. Meyer abstained from a judgment on whether the designer, whom she neglected to identify, had demonstrated such good will.

Lihotzky’s belief in the importance of eliminating household drudgery through rationalization remained firm. In the 1920s, the issue concerned the technical and social transformation of an entire society. It is ironic that a politically engaged Lihotzky seemed to view the kitchen as the motor for change, rather than as a manifestation of redomestication. There is no evidence that either Lihotzky or May wanted to pursue a more extreme solution. Neither of them ever proposed a communal model and May, in his own home, maintained a traditional household and his wife, a traditional role. While his home was enriched by the latest in spatial planning, modern materials and equipment, its woman’s sphere remained a recognizably nineteenth-century one. Lihotzky, meanwhile, lived in her Kranicherstrasse terrace apartment with her husband, Wilhelm Schütte.
Reportedly, she rarely used her Frankfurt kitchen; she was not interested in cooking. She was indeed a New Woman, her marriage of the new kind of egalitarian marriage, the so-called companionate marriage or *Komeradschaftsehe* that was sought after among young artists and designers who saw in modernism not only the praxis of their profession, but a blueprint for their lifestyle.  

Whether Lihotzky’s Frankfurt Kitchen actually lessened the workload of the traditional housewife is unclear—with women assuming jobs outside the home and becoming isolated in smaller family units, all indications are that their burden was growing rather than diminishing, in spite of labor-saving devices. Their plight was shaped by a larger socioeconomic reality that would not be solved by design. Indeed, it can be argued that “scientific” design solutions simply eased the transition of housewives, as it had the factory work force, into a rationalized capitalist economy. The progressive goal of investing in “women’s work” some of the dignity of a profession does not bear scrutiny. The workstation was not borrowed from the professional world, but from the factory, from labor characterized by single, repetitive, and mind-numbing operations. The notion of creativity was anathema to this model—it was for the manager/designer, the Taylorizer of the space, to blot out free action by delimiting an imperative “one best way.” That this was not a situation compatible with household labor, with its myriad tasks and practices, and various member composition, was largely irrelevant to the overriding ideological notions of efficiency and scientism.

Indeed, household labor itself was revealed in the parallel made between the factory worker and the housewife to be a degraded process, as the persistent references to it as “drudgery” confirm. To all accounts, the “professional” housewife was admittedly committed to a life of grinding labor from which she could only be freed for brief moments through the application of techniques invented by authorities in the professional world. In the 1920s there were few critics of this limited policy—few among the powerful women’s groups, and fewer still within the ranks of the SDP.

The backlash against the women’s movement that followed WWI echoed this general erosion and devaluation of women’s contribution. At the same time, the positivist and male-defined architectural culture produced new artifacts of domesticity for the developing market in household goods. It also facilitated a new professional role for designers, one that might emerge only after the home had been consecrated as a professional realm and was shorn of feminine attributes.

Lihotzky herself viewed this work primarily as part of a broader socialist enterprise, independent of any notion of feminist politics:
My work was based on the idea of women who worked and not in cooking itself. I had never concerned myself with cooking in my life. Nowadays this is seen as feminist but it was not feminist at all.  

This last remark, that basing her research on women who worked was “not feminist at all,” reflects the situation of would-be professional women in an era of limited options: either to embrace patriarchal culture as a New Woman, as Lihotzky did, or to support it from the vantage point of the helpmeet, as did women in the ranks of the RDH and Ilse May. Lihotzky’s ideal, both personally and in her work on behalf of women, was clearly to reject the confines of home in favor of participation in the public world of men. Even backed by modernized domestic facilities, for most German housewives there was no such choice. The Frankfurt Kitchen may be taken as a kind of emblem of this cultural conundrum: a brief, if uncomfortable, resolution between women’s culture and the ideal of a technological utopia.

“Labor-Saving, Clean and Safe:” The New Utilities

The main thing is the electricity. Naturally, in the new current of 220 volts. In the new home it is “the servant girl who performs all tasks”: it cooks the soup, grills the meat, bakes the cake, heats the bath and the cooking water—and, of course, lights the house. . . . And everyone can hear the radio without an antenna. 

“In Electric Römerstadt: America at the Gates”

In 1891, Frankfurt hosted an international electro-technical exhibition, introducing over one million visitors to the wonders of electricity. Through exhibition, the fair’s purveyors hoped to promote centralized electrical networks; to show that, from such large suppliers, power could be delivered across long distances, efficiently and economically. At the entrance to the exhibition, was an archway fitted out with one thousand light bulbs, and an electrically-powered waterfall. A sign proclaimed that the power supplying them had traveled across 175km. Three years later, the city was home to ten companies that manufactured electrical equipment. Within ten years, the city’s Municipal Electric Company had enlarged its power plants and added new ones. By the war’s end, Frankfurt had an energy capacity beyond its largely industrial market. Landmann’s administration then expanded the utility grid into residential areas, encouraging its citizens to embrace the new technology. New Frankfurt settlements—all provided with electricity—moved domestic usage far beyond the average German city.

That electric lighting would soon be the norm was widely assumed, and its household potential was a topic of lively public discussion and professional
debate. Fortuitously, Frankfurt industry had major electro-technical and metal sectors; companies like Opel, Hartmann & Braun AG, Voigt & Haeffner AG made the electric appliances, radio equipment, and the central heating components used in the new settlements, and were making steady inroads in the growing household consumer market.83 “But [w]hat good does it do us to expend our energies to increase production at hydraulic plants, what can be the use of the numerous and increasingly improved inventions of our scientists and engineers if the people refuse to use and enjoy these achievements?”84 And so, municipal agencies, the gas and electric companies, housewife’s associations, all encouraged women to take advantage of labor-saving electrical appliances—coffee percolators, tea kettles, egg beaters, plate warmers, egg cookers, toasters, and electric irons.85 The most sought after was the vacuum cleaner.86 An entire segment of the film about Ernst May’s home was devoted to a motor and its attachments that could grind coffee beans, blend, mix, and churn butter. Berlin architect and the municipal city planner Ludwig Grünig wrote a glowing account of the Römerstadt kitchen, ignoring Grete Lihotzky’s kitchen design in favor of the appliances: the Prometheus stove and water heater, and the retractable work light got his attention.87 The refrigerator had at least one trial in the Frankfurt settlements, at Bornheimer Hang, where units were also wired for telephone service.88

Demand for electricity in Frankfurt increased exponentially with the end of hyperinflation, such that city industries producing household appliances and central heating components used in the settlements were among those faring best in the rationalization crisis of 1926.89 Like the Frankfurt Kitchen, this was a joint endeavor between the city and private companies—a cornerstone of Landmann’s larger policies—that allowed for the “luxuries” of the new Frankfurt household. Here, Frankfurt’s public utility office, under the direction of Franz Tillmetz, played a major role.

After a visit to America where he saw model kitchens prominently displayed in shopping districts, Tillmetz proposed creating a similar one in Frankfurt, a permanent downtown exhibition to educate the public in modern services and appliances. Under his initiative, Adolf Meyer transformed a nineteenth-century arcade, the “Kaiser Wilhelm Passage,” into the Frankfurt Gas Company’s “Gaspassage.” Remodeled and expanded, the new arcade was stringently sachlich and transparent. (Figures 3.09–10) Meyer inserted a great concrete frame inside the original arcade. On the second floor, the commercial offices were lit by the existing skylight. Making an atrium, Meyer inserted a new skylight, made of Zeiss translucent glass panels, that lit the new passage below. There, information coun-
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Lighted signs, designed by Robert Michel, exemplified the city’s new signage guidelines. The light fixtures were Meyer’s design, and produced by Zeiss. Former Bauhäusler, Karl Peter Röhl chose the interior wall colors, and the artist Carl Grossberg, a Bauhäusler known for his depictions of industrial interiors, designed murals illustrating gas production, unfortunately, foregone to save money. Constant foot traffic through this “handy and convenient public thoroughfare” provided an audience for displays of the latest in heating equipment: gas and electric ovens and stoves, hot water heaters and modern kitchen apparatus. Tillmetz’s office worked with the local domestic education authorities in administering the exhibits. One of Grete Lihotzky’s kitchens occupied the front window, where it was used for cooking.

Figure 3.09 The Gaspassage, entrance. Adolf Meyer, 1928.

Figure 3.10 The Gaspassage. Interior and appliance display, 1928.
demonstrations. Housewives could sign up for courses in cooking, baking, roasting, and preserving, all using modern utilities and appliances. By 1930, Römerstadt women reported that, while they still relied on the coal stove for cooking at least two days weekly, most had changed their method of cooking under the influence of the electric kitchen and were using simpler recipes.

Was Römerstadt too luxurious?

The housing need in Frankfurt was less extreme than in Vienna; Frankfurt was relatively rich. On the other hand, in Vienna housing was fully paid for by tax revenues, and the rent was determined by the wages of an unskilled worker. In Frankfurt, we had about 50 percent funding from federal taxes, the other 50 had to come from municipal sources. As a result, the rent was well beyond what a Frankfurt laborer could pay. So we could only build for skilled labor. The advantage was that we could make things in Frankfurt that weren’t feasible in Vienna, a house with its own bath, for example.

—Grete Lihotzky, 1997

The tenants barely notice the trifling expense [incurred by the Frankfurt Kitchen], on the other hand, saving the initial cost of kitchen equipment is welcome, especially among young marrieds, and housewives greatly appreciate the relief from drudgery it lends.

—Walter Schürmeyer

Römerstadt’s households were among the most modern in Germany. Those who made the trip from the Weissenhof Exhibition to visit Frankfurt’s famous settlement found not only a garden suburb, but the country’s first completely electrified community. The astounding array of home conveniences set a new, some said unrealistic, standard for state-funded housing: every unit had a hot water heater supplying a modern kitchen and bathroom, an electric or gas stove, electric lights, a cable radio hookup, and central heating. There was no more need to fetch fuel for cooking or heating, no need for the requisite storage space or utensils, none of the dirt or smoke, and the stoves and ovens were smaller, making for a more compact kitchen. Cooking, laundry and ablutions each had their own space and equipment, relieving the kitchen of confusion and conflict.

Römerstadt was widely hailed in advertisements for these utilities and appliances. The manufacturer Prometheus used Römerstadt kitchens and baths to advertise its water heaters and stoves. In the advertising pages of DNF, the municipal electric company offered a new installment-plan service called the TZ system that would promised to run electrical appliances and installations in the quietest way. Another company tempted customers with “Electricity in the household for all purposes—ironing, cooking, heating, and appliances—lightens
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every household chore, ends drudgery, and provides comfort.” Voigt & Haefner, using a photo of Höhenblick, advertised itself as an electro-technical specialist.

The collaboration between the Hochbauamt and local manufacturers drew the New Life of liberal reformers out of its countercultural roots into the modern consumer economy. In the late 1920s, the nexus of market elements and city programs promised to transform household culture and household relations in a way that the careful partnering of the Werkbund designers with industry could never do. In the same years, the business around model households delineated a lifestyle that would only emerge as a standard after the next world war.

A persistent and troubling question of Römerstadt in its own time was whether working families could really afford its luxuries. May was adamant that modern household technology was essential to public housing for cultural, hygienic, and financial reasons. Using a classic rationalization argument, he and Lihotzky argued that savings accrued in other areas of the household—the size of the kitchen, for example, made these modern services affordable.

Central heating raised similar issues. Gas was cheap in Frankfurt, a reasonable alternative to coal. Settlements with their own heating plants accrued further savings by reducing their dependency on expensive, outside suppliers. The plants supplied both heat and hot water, and were often combined with a public laundry, with its need for both in quantity. Still, the monthly heating charge at Bruchfeldstrasse was estimated to be 11 marks, one quarter of a month’s rent. In the following years of economic crisis and depression, the electric and gas servicing of the settlements seemed something less than a miracle. The burden of utility rates was always great, and it was an expense that workers did not incur in older housing. After 1929, many householders, unable to meet their utility bills, sat in dark, unheated rooms, and ate uncooked dinners. They reverted to coal, if they had a stove as some row houses did, until coal became too expensive. Apparently, some resorted to a portable primus burner. An ad published in the daily papers made such an impression that a crowd rushed a demonstration at the Shrove tide carnival. Such hardships played at least a psychological role in the renaissance of self-help, and the nostalgia for völkisch trappings, as the claims made for technology were put to their first severe test.

Römerstadt was a prime target for accusations of the Hochbauamt’s purported wanton extravagance; that May’s office was more interested in impressing its professional peers, than building pragmatically. Critics, on radio, in the papers, and on the city council, believed their accusation born out by May’s aggressive pursuit of publicity. The sharpest criticism concerned precisely the electrification
that had so fascinated the city on the settlement’s inauguration. By the fall of 1928, newspapers reported on the disastrous consequences of utility price hikes. Römerstadt residents called for the installation of gas lines to the electric stove and water heater. In 1929, a survey of 448 Römerstadt families found that half were happy with electricity; 35 percent thought the kitchen’s utilities were too expensive. Most had encountered technical problems of one sort or another, notably the hot water tank in many homes froze for seven weeks or more during the unusually harsh winter. Those with coal stoves said they still used it for cooking at least two days a week. Ninety-six percent reported a rise in their utility costs, and a majority reported that the water heaters were inadequate to meet family needs. On the other hand, 69 percent reported that they had changed their method of cooking as a result of the electric kitchen, and were using simpler recipes, and many had given up the practice of boiling their clothes in the kitchen in favor of the settlement laundry. The Frankfurter Nachrichten came to the defense of Römerstadt, arguing that the debate should focus on the settlement in its entirety, not just the kitchens; the survey had produced a largely negative impression of a settlement where most residents were actually happy.

The unusually cold winter of 1928/29 and resulting coal shortage, indeed, played havoc with household budgets, and aroused a national debate on utility servicing. Lüders called for the public to defer judgment until the return of normal conditions, although she opined that the country was safer in the hands of central heating plants, than with individual households stoking stoves and ovens. On the controversy over electricity and gas, she averred that electricity was safest, but too expensive for most working families. The Hochbauamt reported that, “During construction we recognized that … the electricity produced at night would be very cheap, … no more expensive than gas for heating water.” In answer to a doubting press—including the usual champion the Frankfurter Zeitung—that the cost was simply too much for the tenants, the answer was that housewives liked it, and it was premature to judge its costs. In June 1929, the Römerstadt Advocacy Group—its members acting as settlement spokespersons—agreed that residents basically approved of electric servicing. In 1930, May’s office produced its own study in defense of its energy policy. “The Electrified Household in Römerstadt” was a model of propaganda, with a color cover designed by Hans Leistikow, glossy pages, photographs, a modern typeface and layout. The pamphlet argued that electricity had major hygienic advantages, and lacked the dangers of explosion and poisoning incurred with gas. It enlisted the testimony of the RKW, which averred that the full transition of the household to electricity was clearly indicated
by American example. The RKW cited the labor-saving advantages that freed German housewives’ talents for the education of children and the care of body and spirit. By 1931, city offices could report a more general satisfaction among the residents. “It should be stressed that the technical advances of the fully electrified household are recognized by everyone.” Affordability was not so clear.

Laundry day

The fueling and lighting of fires to heat water and boil clothes; the filling and emptying of tubs; the space required for stacking, washing, and drying; the air suffused with heat and damp, with soap, bleach and starch; this ordeal followed by long hours at the iron—of all household chores, laundering was the most arduous and backbreaking. Then there was the clutter: drying laundry took over every space in the working-class household; it was strung indoors in the winter, in yards, and on porches in fine weather. The public laundry provided relief from these scenarios. It unburdened the kitchen of boiling tubs of clothes, and the household from drooping lines and racks of steaming laundry, and freed the housewife from a great deal of the labor. New settlement laundries in Bruchfeldstrasse, Bornheimer Hang, Praunheim, Riedhof, and Westhausen were open to residents for a nominal fee, or, in the case of Westhausen, a mandatory fee included in the rent. The facilities, complete with washers, centrifuges, drying cabinets, mangles, and irons, not to mention hot, running water, were hailed for their labor-saving potential. Lihotzky calculated that the Praunheim facility reduced a typical laundry day from fifteen to five hours.

The Praunheim laundry was built in the center of Praunheim II. (Figure 1.19) Cetto designed the building, and Lihotzky laid out and chose the interior fixtures. It was a T-shaped block, painted in bright colors, its smooth front wall set back from its row house neighbors. The protruding wing behind revealed a concrete frame with inset panels. Inside, peripheral cubicles were each equipped with a soaking tub, a sink, and a wash table. In the center aisle were eight, large lateral-tumbling washing machines, four centrifuges, and two dehumidifiers, tall standards each topped by a shallow dish. There was a separate room with lockers and mangles, and rows of laundry lines were installed from the exposed beams on the roof. (Figures 3.11–12)

The Westhausen facility housed the heating plant on the ground floor; the laundry occupied the second. The building bore a strong similarity to Blanck’s transformer stations set in neighborhoods around the city. Likewise, it was made
of reinforced concrete, and had metal furnishings, glass walls and partitions. The primary architectural interest was the long bay windows, one on either flank of the building across four bays, and running down through both stories. Load-bearing walls in this section were replaced with pairs of reinforced concrete columns sitting well within the building. The assemblage of windows walls, glass partitions and freestanding concrete columns bear a comparison to the dining area of the Altersheim, where Kramer had recently been at work.\(^{114}\) (Figures 3.13, 6.60)

Kramer celebrated the building in terms of its functionalist attributes: the reinforced concrete skeleton, the “minimal stairs”—a steel staircase derived from ship stairs but with left/right treads, and the technical equipment.\(^ {115}\) It sat in the important first quadrant of the grid. (Figure 7.01) The equipment was laid out in the same way as Praunheim—although Lihotzky is not mentioned. Appliances in its long central bays were flanked by banks of soaking tubs. These, in turn, fronted the translucent glass partitions of individual washing cubicles. Users particularly liked the outdoor clotheshorses and the warmed indoor racks for drying. (Figures 3.14–15) The Frankfurter Zeitung lauded the installation: with its state-of-the-art equipment and glazed walls, it was the “primary ornament of the settlement.”\(^ {116}\)

The laundries were a grand success, servicing many households; women reported giving up their practice of boiling clothes on the stove.\(^ {117}\) They also became gathering places, hubs of news and conversation.\(^ {118}\) Westhausen, which failed to get its community building, used the laundry for tenant meetings and set up the soup kitchen there in 1930.
But success brought its own problems. In Praunheim, the number of users climbed to the point of strain. Many, unfamiliar with the equipment, exacerbated wear and tear. May proposed extending tutorials for novices. He also applied for funds to build a second settlement laundry; a proposal the city council rejected as too expensive. There were complaints about maintenance, overbooking, and petty graft. In 1930, fifteen residents filed a complaint accusing the manager of bullying and favoritism. He purportedly blackballed some users, while admitting non-residents—friends from the village of Praunheim and Römerstadt Siedlung. The settlement club undertook arbitration, to no avail. Meanwhile,

Figure 3.13 The Westhausen central heating and laundry building. Plan, 1928.

Figure 3.14 The Westhausen laundry. Interior.
the laundry was not meeting expenses. Club officials opined that this was not solely the fault of “the inexpert and seemingly unscrupulous proprietor.” Indeed, it seemed that there had been a tailing off in use: unable to manage the fees as the depression set in, women were doing their laundry at home once again.\textsuperscript{120}

Unfortunately, the electric laundries only ever served a modest few, cost and funding approvals mitigating against their provision for residents beyond apartment dwellers. In the limited space of the row houses laundry was still done in the home, and it remained an awkward and intrusive task. There were amenities to ease the burden: hot running water connected to bathtubs and kitchen sinks; in some cases, cellars or storage rooms provided drying space on rainy days. Each Westhausen row house had an old-fashioned, convertible tub with a hinged wooden top. Elsewhere, many settlement houses had cellars with laundry rooms; others had sculleries. Frankfurt forbade laundry hanging in the gardens or on balconies, a common sight in city slums. Instead, orderly drying yards became a prominent feature of the settlement landscape. (Figure 7.14)
Powering the settlements

From the Frankfurt Kitchen, to the new appliances, and the electric laundry, “new housekeeping” policy was motivated by Frankfurt’s campaign to modernize municipal utilities and expand the power grid, as much as by concerns for woman’s sphere. From an industrial perspective, the effort was a resounding success. By 1930, the Municipal Electric Company was powering most of the city—its industry, retail, tramways, street lighting and housing for a population of about 550,000. In a radio broadcast, Landmann declared Frankfurt’s new electrical and gas works “unsurpassed in their boldness;” the installation of electric servicing into the city fabric an achievement equal to the settlement program itself. This was the “TVA” of Frankfurt, a grand project celebrating the powering of the city in its march out of the grim post-war years, into a future of modern prosperity. Testifying to these achievements, Adolf Meyer’s two great industrial monuments assumed their own magnificence in a display of rough-hewn forms of concrete. The East Gas Works (Gaswerk Ost, 1927) and the Municipal Electric Company, Testing Facility 6 (Städtische Elektrizitätswerke, Prüfamt 6, 1929) represented the highpoint of his achievements, and the culmination of his fascination with the potential of reinforced concrete.

At the Hochbauamt, Meyer’s office was a model of technical study and experimentation. Meyer, himself, was devoted to the study of concrete construction, and had already gleaned significant experience. Since his early collaboration with Gropius on the Faguswerk, to postwar projects including the Bauhaus “Haus am Horn” and the Jena Planetarium, he had studied the potentialities and pitfalls of this new material: “The primary reason for the cracks must be
sought in the general lack of knowledge and inexactitude in the building’s construction, together with multiple instances of extreme skimping in calculations, the acceptance of which for first-class construction would be questionable,” he said of the August Müller Factory project of 1925. Precision was the motive behind his hiring “first class” technical people, like the engineer C. H. Craemer, an expert in calculation theory and reinforced concrete. Over the next few years, Craemer designed framing systems for numerous New Frankfurt projects, although the specifics are not well known. He also assumed a teaching post at the Kunstschule, where he taught structures, and he wrote for *DNF;* explaining the aesthetics of engineered structures, and positing the relationship between aesthetics and form derived from measure. Craemer was part of the design team that contributed to the city’s growing infrastructure of concrete buildings. Transformer and switching stations, designed by Cetto and Eugen Blanck, with brusquely expressive displays of textured concrete and large expanses of glass wall, testified to the advance of modernization into the city’s neighborhoods. (Figure 3.16) Blanck contributed a round station made of concrete panels for Heideplatz, Bornheim. Plants in the settlements—where heat generated locally represented a significant economy—were considered plum assignments. Blanck, Kramer, and Mart Stam designed plants for Bornheimer Hang, Westhausen and Hellerhof, making them focal elements in the settlement landscape.

From the monumental East Gas Works and the Testing Facility 6 to his humble pavilion at Sommerhoff Park, the Gaspassage, even the collection of street furniture he designed for the Taunusanlage, the park that ringed the central city, Meyer elaborated a powerful language in concrete during his two brief years in Frankfurt. These projects were of great professional interest, and were widely-published, from *DNF* to the great folio of industrial projects in the series of volumes *L’Art International d’Aujourd’hui.* (Figure 3.17) The East Gas Works were featured on the cover of issue number 1, *DNF* in 1929.
An innovation of German industry was the conversion of coal to natural gas. Companies like IG Farben and Bayer used the waste products to produce dyes, coal tar, and aspirin. This was the job of the great gas works in the East Harbor, where the assembly included Peter Behrens’s curious towers. With an expansion, funded by 2.7 million marks in American foreign aid during the stabilization period, Frankfurt’s gas works became the sole rival to Germany’s Ruhr Valley plants. Meyer began work on the new cokery the year of his arrival in Frankfurt. Adapting the expressive architectural character initiated by Behrens, he configured each step in the refinement process with its own component and form. He shaped the great mixing tower and the flue, the central silo, batteries, loading docks, ovens, and coke pressing machines according to process and scientific calculation. While the main structure and machinery housings were rough concrete, workrooms had exterior brick walls. Coal rode up conveyor belts to the coal silo through slides made of brick, concrete, and glass. The expressive centerpiece of the ensemble was the 36m-high tower, with its bluntly vaulted roof, lofted into the air by attenuated columns. The coal moved to the next building by cable carts carried on high steel trusses. The final stage, with its fabric filter and loading docks, was housed in a partly-skeletal, quadratic-framed building with extensive viaducts in unfinished concrete.
His other major project, Testing Facility 6, more popularly, the “E-Werk,” was the administrative headquarters and physical plant for Frankfurt’s Municipal Electric Company. (Figure 3.19) Already by 1890, Germany’s electro-technical industry rivaled America’s. Its products had expanded well beyond industrial applications into concessions for public lighting, trams, and all the equipment required to deliver power. Berlin’s General Electricity Company (AEG, Allgemeine Elektrizitäts Gesellschaft) had its own production, design, and research departments, and provided a steady flow of information addressing customers’ needs and desires. Similarly, from the East Harbor plants to its many transfer stations, Frankfurt’s new E-Werk facility administered and tended to the power infrastructure, built new components, and tested products in its laboratories. The site, not far from the railway station, was on Gutleutstrasse, a street lined by small industries, and workers’ sports fields.

Meyer’s E-Werk was an extensive and complex ensemble. The administrative block facing the street housed offices, meeting rooms, a photometry hall, laboratories, and living quarters for maintenance crews. It was the company’s public face as well, convening tours for the public, who marveled at Meyer’s building and the
complexities of its operations, in the same way they had been fascinated by the 1891 Electro-Technical Exhibition. In an early scheme, Meyer rendered its façade with a glass curtain wall—reminiscent of the workshop building at the Dessau Bauhaus. As the project labored under work stoppages and budget cuts, he transformed it into a syncopation of horizontal and vertical blocks of raw concrete. The exterior now had more of a kinship with Meyer and Gropius’s industrial works, such as for Gebrüder Kappe & Co. (1922), a long, very plain block with wide, horizontal windows flush with a concrete wall. The revised E-Werk block had thick concrete walls, revealed by deep-set windows with minimal, but probably painted, frames. (Figure 3.20) The stair tower displayed a wall of punched squares filled with glass block, a strong, vertical element that faced the approach from the city. Fragile glass balcony partitions between dwelling units on the third-floor were all that remained of the language of the glass wall. The public face of the E-Werk was a strong, even stolid representation of white-collars at work.

In accommodating the rest of the complex program, Meyer used Craemer’s frame of the type used at Sommerhoff Park—just across the street—to create a surprising openness. (Figure 5.21) The square, structural grid with a span of some 5 meters was left largely open, a framework within which room partitions could be arrayed for many and various needs. Two concentric rings of offices were separated by a corridor, with a courtyard at the center, roofed in the manner of the Gaspassage, and covered with a skylight.

From the administrative block, the structure moved deep into the site in a series of assemblage, production, and storage facilities. The structural skeleton extended into a wing devoted to assembly and repair, opening up onto a remark-
able open rotunda. It was covered by a great saucer dome developed by Dyckerhoff & Widmann for planetaria. (Figure 3.21) Founded in 1865, the firm was a major force in the field of reinforced concrete vaulting, having built bridges, water works, even contemporary churches. The renowned engineer Ulrich Finsterwalder was the motive force of the company, an inventor of thin shell domes.

An early project was the great dome of Max Berg’s Centenary Hall (1911) in Breslau. The E-Werk dome had a circular grid of steel reinforcement impregnated with concrete, the so-called Torkret system. Its interior revealed raw formwork patterns. Illuminated by a central oculus filled with square glass bricks, and resting on eight tapered columns, the rotunda lay open to the work yard on one side of the building; surrounding bays provided for the manufacture and repair of streetlights, network apparatus and cable. The wing continued with seven vaulted magazines, its great skeletal interiors surmounted by Zeiss-Dywidag transverse barrel-shells. The thin-shell (4cm) vaults were reinforced periodically with arched ribs, allowing for the skylights running down their middle, a remarkable feat revealing the virtuosity of the structure. The two- and three-story interior contained workshops, stores, and a machine hall. (Figure 3.22) The last three bays were open to the courtyard, and used for laying out cable. The vault exteriors were to be lightly painted and emerge “like a mirror,” an echo perhaps of the electric spark.

Meyer did not live to see the E-Werk completed. But here and with the E-Werk, he achieved two superbly engineered structures, monumental configurations of industrial processes, without embellishment save textures of rough formwork.
Useable Furniture

Everyone in Frankfurt is buying modern, solid Gebrauchsmöbel [useable furniture] of every sort and finish, including the settlement models [Typen] designed by May, Schuster, Kramer, all of the best quality and at the best price.137

—Advertisement, Hausrat GmbH, 1929

The seemingly redundant term “Gebrauchsmöbel”—the literal translation is “useable furniture”—is clarified by juxtaposition with its possible inspiration, the concept of “Gebrauchsmusik.”138 Like music played on the radio, like jazz or popular songs, Gebrauchsmöbel was classless, and aesthetically and functionally modern. Useable music and useable furniture would replace the concert hall and the private salon with the radio and the mass-produced chair.

The prefix “gebrauchs” made a significant contribution to the debate on everyday culture. It was adopted in a variety of fields of invention and design, performing similarly to “neue” as a timely descriptor, but with more profound semantic consequences, indicating an injection of political urgency, cultural populism and accessibility. For example, the neologism Gebrauchsmöbel, apparently coined in Frankfurt, referred to practical, modern furniture; Gropius referred to a beautifully designed car as a “Gebrauchswagen,” and the housing in his 1928 Dammerstock Siedlung “Gebrauchswohnungen.”139 For all the number of “gebrauchs”-designated objects, the measure of excellence was the same: accessibility paired with quality. Thus we come to the subject of furniture, the last major item in the fitting out and rationalization of the new household.
The stabilization of the German mark in 1925 was a turning point in furniture production. Within two years, modern materials and production methods transformed handmade Werkbund furniture into simpler, rationalized forms for factory production. Stam’s prototype, the “Kragstuhl,” was a chair made from gas pipes held together with elbow fittings, its bending and turning frame reminiscent of Thonet’s ubiquitous bent wood chairs, but in a polemical departure of rough and readymade purposefulness. Structural daring famously produced the cantilevered seat. Schwitters quipped, “Do you know the chair by Mart Stam that only has two legs? Why have four legs, when you can have two?” Shown at the Werkbund Exhibition in 1927, the Kragstuhl—like the Futura font—emerged in many, sleeker models by Breuer, Mies, and Stam himself. The exhibition halls and model houses were filled with new model furniture, including much by Kramer, Stam, and Schuster. Many thought that mass-production would result in furniture having a greater influence on modern living than the house itself. To do so, it needed to be both affordable and suited in size, convenience and economy to the minimal dwelling.

In the mid-nineteenth century, federal law required regions and municipalities provide for the poor. The precise nature of “poor” and “provide” were fungible, and ensuing debates evolved around what constituted the “deserving poor” and what was an existence minimum. While most care continued to come through private charity, in 1903, the Frankfurt Office of the Poor (Armenamt) created the Hausrat Sammelstelle (Household Furnishings Collection Center), later simply called Hausrat (Household Furnishings) to distribute used furniture among the poor. In concert, the Labor Office for the Under- and Unemployed (Arbeitszentrale für Erwerbsbeschränkte; AfE) created jobs programs. Unskilled workers were trained—women, for
example, learned to sew or make confections, men learned woodworking, typesetting, or shoemaking—and unemployed workers, especially the disabled, were given jobs in the organization. The workers came from across the age spectrum, but the majority was over thirty, with an equal part over sixty; most were the mentally or physically disabled. In the pre-war years, the AfE employed several hundred carpenters and laborers in its two lumberyards. (Figure 3.23) In one, twenty woodworking machines and 450 workers were busy at the lumberyards and in the courtyard of a defunct hotel. The wood came from cleared city property, and was made into furniture and implements, like tool handles, to be sold to poor families; the scrap was given away as firewood. The AfE sold furniture, small household goods, groceries, and clothing at its own shops, including some specialty shops, like the confectionery. (Figure 3.24) Hausrat also provided work for the unemployed or the unemployable in the distribution, collection, and, soon, the manufacture of furniture, clothes, and small household implements. Municipal welfare offices filled all their needs for such items at Hausrat stores.¹⁴⁶

A nationwide shortage of furniture emerged during the war—a result of the scarcity of wood, fabric, and labor. In 1917, Frankfurt Hausrat gave away a total of 140 suites of furniture to needy applicants, primarily, to veterans and their families. The shortage lasted well into the 1920s, prices rising 200 and 300 percent.¹⁴⁷ Meanwhile, there emerged a new class of poor, including disabled veterans, and the elderly who lost their savings to hyperinflation. As need grew, Hausrat acquired a decommissioned army barracks in East Harbor to expand manufacturing operations.¹⁴⁸ In 1920, Hausrat used 33,000 marks from the city to buy, in suites, 256 kitchens, 180 bedrooms, 33 living and dining rooms, and myriad individual pieces.¹⁴⁹ During the hyperinflation, the Budge Foundation gifted 500,000 marks to the effort.¹⁵⁰ Still, funding proved inadequate to fill the need, and Hausrat began selling some of its quality inventory to produce revenue.

In 1925, Landmann proposed that Hausrat become a limited liability corporation, a GmbH, a quasi-private commercial enterprise that, in his unique formulation, made it eligible for municipal funding.¹⁵¹ As it did for the municipal trade fairs, the GmbH structure protected Hausrat from the vagaries of the market, at the same time fostering commercial activity—in this case, an advantage neither lost on, nor appreciated by, the parties representing small business interests. In defense, Landmann argued that the only aim was to serve the needs of the poor, needs that commerce did not fill. The new Hausrat GmbH had a fifteen-member board comprising city officials, councilors, and regional representatives. May, only newly arrived, served as chair.¹⁵²
Things did not develop smoothly. Hausrat had begun making simple furniture in 1923; May envisioned expanding its manufacturing operation, and reforming the designs and production to suit contemporary conditions. The city council rejected his proposal to hire the Kunsthochschule professor of textiles, Richard Lister, as artistic director.\textsuperscript{153} Furniture makers complained that Hausrat infringed on their business. And the board refused to take a 'serious' look at May’s manufacturing plan. It agreed that Hausrat-made furniture should be both sound and inexpensive, but objected that the quality May proposed was too costly. His motion to establish a standard failed “against all the advice of the board’s experts.”\textsuperscript{154}

While stymied in some aspects, May had won some concessions from the board, and had possession of funding. He gained the use of the old bourse on Paulsplatz for a showroom, which became the “House of Furniture” ("Haus der Möbel"), its interior designed by Hans Leistikow. One of Hausrat’s two Frankfurt stores next door; the other was on adjacent Braubachstrasse, at number 6, even then, one of the remaining half-timber buildings on the block. At Braubachstrasse 18–22, Paul Paravicini had designed a new Artisans’ Center (Hand-werkerhaus) in a conservative style, completed in 1926.\textsuperscript{155} The Chamber of Artisans (Handwerkskammer) that occupied the building (a body parallel to the Chamber of Commerce (Handelskammer) was the remnant of a guild. In 1897, the Kaiser abolished exclusive membership in craft chambers, centralized their administration and tied them to the state. As industrialization marginalized artisanal labor, the Chambers of Artisans worked to protect handcrafted commodities, in some part, through an alliance with the German Arts and Crafts movement. They also aligned with the völkisch reaction. In the course of the 1920s, the relationship between city housing programs and skilled craftsmen in the building trades became embittered, as previously described. But through a loose coalition of the Handelskammer, the Kunsthochschule, the Hochbauamt, Hausrat and the Unemployment Office, May attempted an alliance with regard to furniture.

The details of this coalition remain obscure, but it seems to have had some success in overcoming embedded antipathies for a time.\textsuperscript{156} For example, in 1926, Lihotzky proposed setting up a research and public information office—a kind of advice center for the household—in the Handwerkerhaus, where she found there were four available rooms.\textsuperscript{157} Her proposal is virtually identical to that proposed by the Household Economy department of the Rfg, and the proposal submitted by Lüders in 1927. How the two were connected remains uncertain. Lihotzky’s office would study labor-saving kitchens and built-in furniture, and advise the public. It would test new materials and equipment, and produce new models
and their mechanical interface. The central location would foster publicity and public education. She envisioned the production of prospectuses and photos, and publishing "in all kinds of newspapers and magazines," and the creation of slide presentations—arranged as a series of good and bad examples, with the Frankfurt, Bauhaus, Pollack-Hellwig and Brenner kitchens as models. The office would engage housewives’ clubs with talks, demonstrations and exhibits, send articles to major city newspapers, and contact influential people and architects. Lihotzky requested city financing for the first year, and then proposed to bring in four or five regional cities to contract similar services. She would need an office with the services of a lawyer, a salesman, two draftsmen, a secretary and a skilled cabinetmaker, and design contributions by Hochbauamt colleagues.

Lihotzky received no support for her idea. On the eve of Hausrat’s dissolution, she resubmitted it, separating the research from the production division, much as would be done in 1930 in reconfiguring municipal building authorities. She now stressed collaboration with private manufacturers. The office would publish lists of approved products—furniture, lamps, fabrics, and appliances—and show how interiors of minimal dwellings could be conveniently laid out in a “neutral place” where merchants and makers could “wage the battle against shoddy furniture and kitsch.” Once again, nothing came of her proposal.

Meanwhile, things at Hausrat had progressed. In 1922, Hausrat customers comprised 50 percent workers, 20 percent self-employed skilled laborers, and 20 percent white-collar workers. By 1927, sales of new and used furniture were maintaining a steady pace with a similar customer base. Hausrat advertised, “Quality furniture available on the installment plan.” This was new furniture, designed and produced locally. One month after his arrival, May had announced a design competition for a furniture line. The brief called for three furnished rooms, a kitchen, bedroom, and a living room, “harmoniously and simply realized, ensembles suitable for settlement houses for blue-collar, service- and office-workers. . . and for mass production as Typenmöbel (typed furniture).” Kramer won first prize, and May hired him shortly thereafter. Kramer’s designs and those of the third place winner, Lucy Hillebrand, became the centerpieces for the showroom, the Hausrat display at Die neue Wohnung und ihr Innenausbau, and was also shown at the Dusseldorf Gesolei Exhibition. Full-page ads appeared in DNF

| Figure 3.25 Hausrat, no. 1, 1929. |
and Hausrat’s eponymously-named and modest journal. (Figures 2.22, 3.25) *Hausrat*, with its simple newsprint format, was for sale at Hausrat shops, where it found a popular audience. The ads showed Kramer’s kitchen suite with its hutch, table, and cupboard, and gave addresses for the ten Hausrat shops in the region.

Ferdinand Kramer worked for May for five years, from 1925 to 1930. Like May, he was a native Frankfurter, born of a family of skilled artisans; his father was a hat maker, his grandfather was in shipbuilding. After his war service, Kramer began training to be architect at the Munich Technische Hochschule under Theodor Fischer. He had a brief sojourn at the Bauhaus in 1919, but after only a few months, unhappy with the “technical training,” he returned to Munich to complete his studies. Back in Frankfurt, he found little architectural employment at the height of the inflation, and went to work for a cabinetmaker designing household objects and furnishings. His furniture comprised simple forms, square in proportion, lacquered with oil paint; his materials soon expanded, bringing plywood and metal into play. He first showed his work at the Haus Werkbund exhibition in Frankfurt in 1923. Kramer described himself as a functionalist dedicated to the cause of the everyday and its people, and credited his designs to the “good science” emerging from the war; objections to standardized furniture came from those who still believed the home should be stamped by personality. “One should ask if the furniture of our fathers was individual in this sense. It is a reactionary fairy tale, envisioning an “anarchy of free will.” Furniture was bereft of memory and meaning; it should no more be left to the chance acquisition than circulation in building or urban land use. In 1924, he produced the “Kramer Oven,” a small, but powerful heating stove made of sheet metal, and showed it at the Werkbund Exhibition called *Form ohne Ornament* (*Form without Ornament*). After winning the Hausrat competition, he went to work at the Hochbauamt designing furniture for housing, schools, day care centers and the like.

Beginning in 1927, until its liquidation in January 1930, Hausrat manufactured and sold modestly-priced *Gebrauchsmöbel*. Kramer and Franz Schuster were the primary designers. Unemployed carpenters and laborers, combining handcrafting and machine work, made the furniture, much as had been done in previous years. Hausrat also collaborated with the Kunstschule, bringing students into the design process. In these cases, the work seems to have been for Hochbauamt commissions, schools in particular. For example, Kramer and his students designed the furniture for the Hallgartenstrasse kindergarten—a house block renovated by Franz Roeckle.
Design principles

It is widely known that people, moving into new settlement houses, are shocked by the small dimensions of the rooms and the low ceilings. The pre-war rental barracks have accustomed us to large rooms with remarkably high ceilings. Such grand proportions were unintended, no one having given much thought to the cost of the practice, or its impact on rents. . . . After the war, economic pressures compelled us to study the measure of space. This resulted in a house form and type for the general population very unlike the old.175

—Franz Schuster, 1929

The concept of Gebrauchsmöbel was founded on two presuppositions: minimal dwellings equipped with space-efficient furnishings, and modern, production techniques. Modularity, mobility, and multi-purpose functioning were corollaries, as was gender- and ritual- neutrality. Designers also averred that living with modern furniture would instruct the working class in a new form of beauty, and bring calm and joy to daily life. All in all, Gebrauchsmöbel would contribute to a retuning of popular sensibilities. Schwitters was bemused:

I can’t imagine that one simply steps through one of these [standardized] doorways—one strides through. Grand, pure human forms stride through the doors, full of new spirit, hopefully anyway. It is like the Frankfurt settlements, where the people arrive with their green overstuffed sofas. It can happen that, after all, the residents are not as mature and free as their [new] doors. But we hope that the houses ennoble them.176

Small, practical furniture was important in 1927, but became critical when the minimal dwelling was mandated in 1929. Designers then turned more purposefully to built-in furniture and furniture that could fold away and otherwise transform. In Praunheim and Westhausen, the apartments were provided with built-in closets, and fold-down or rollaway beds. May explained to the city council that the purpose was to save money for the poorer householders who owned little.177 The budget minister Asch responded to May’s funding request for these extras with the suggestion that they cut the number of such units in half.178

Another aspect considered in the design of new model furniture was the incipient nomadism of a crisis-ridden time. Throughout the upheavals of the interwar period, the horse-drawn wagon loaded with cumbersome family belongings was a ubiquitous sight, a sad picture of private lives exposed and vulnerable to the elements and prying eyes. (Figures 4.01–02) As a fact of modern life, moving house was a recognized, if not an embraced phenomenon: “people are mobile and frequently uprooted, so we build things in.”179 The new furniture assuaged this inevitability making moving simpler, even impersonal. The new furniture trans-
formed the anguish of upheaval into the excitement of the new, and exchanged the comfort of stability for portability.

It also enabled transformability, an idea demonstrated in Paul Wolff’s *Die Frankfurter Kleinstwohnung* (1927). The film followed a “typical” family of three through the course of a day in their Praunheim *Einliegerwohnung*, as the housewife rearranged the furniture for each occasion. The small square table next to the chesterfield served the couple and baby for breakfast in the morning. After the husband departed for work, she stowed it, and drew out a leafed dining table in anticipation of a friend’s arrival for tea. In the evening, the husband returned and the whole group retired to the terrace where the small table reappeared, and the child was entertained with a set of modern blocks. The universality of these few components and their “assemble-ability” transformed the minimal dwelling from morning to evening, from apartment to apartment, and with changing family composition.

A kind of super-efficiency characterized some work. Here, small storage areas were specialized to facilitate, but also to limit, the use of space. Lihotzky’s 1930 modular furniture line “offered the advantages of spatial adaptability, changeability, and portability.”180 The series included 103 distinct pieces. There were six daybeds; seventeen freestanding table types, and ten shelf options. The other pieces were all devoted to storage. Closet components alone comprised seventy elements, as she differentiated clothing-, dirty laundry-, and airing-cupboards, sideboards, and sewing cabinets—each with special dividers for cutlery or notions—broom- and utility-closets, and writing desks. Accessories included
patented clothes hooks, tie holders, screens, and broom holders. The purchaser could assemble combinations to suit her dwelling, without help of a carpenter. S/he created “built-in” furniture by bolting the pieces together, leveling them with setscrews to make a kind of do-it-yourself “Frankfurt Apartment.”

There was an intense professional interest in modern furniture. Both architects and designers created model rooms for publication, and public display, and each new settlement was accompanied by model rooms laid out in demonstration of the New Life at home. Interior designer and assistant to Elsaesser, Karl Wiehl (1898–1952) designed and exhibited furniture specifically for Römerstadt; Schuster, Kramer, Rudloff, and Kaufmann all produced furnished settlement rooms.181 (Figures 2.02–03, 2.11, 3.26–27) And there are indications that a sizable number among the working class adopted the ideal represented by Hausrat’s initiatives. In Erich Fromm’s survey of Frankfurt workers, 10 percent avowed simplicity in their home decor. Typically, respondents said that “cleanliness and an occasional flower “were the only ornament a household needed.” Another 3 percent claimed the Neue Sachlichkeit as their ‘style.’182

The portability and generic functionality of modern furniture also produced gender neutrality, challenging the extensive and intricate array of furnishings employed in bourgeois life. In the homes of the well-to-do, protocol and fashion required suites of furniture particular to a large number of rooms and salons. The dining room had its particular needs, but so did the morning room, the men’s library, and women’s sitting room.183 In this context, the new furniture was as revolutionary as the flat roof or the androgynous New Woman. A chair
served men and women equally, and could serve at a dressing table, as easily as a desk or dining table. For a middle class bankrupted by the hyperinflation, modern furniture was convenient for subdividing large homes—often their one remaining asset—into smaller suites or rooms they could sublet or open to other family members. Their large furnishings and heirlooms overflowed the city’s shops into the 1930s. A keen aesthetic and philosophical interest among the fashionable, art collectors and intellectuals provided a nascent market for more finely made and custom furniture. Showrooms in the larger settlements of Höhenblick and Römerstadt tend to picture a gracious and middle-class lifestyle (Figure 3.28); Gebrauchsmöbel tableaux quickly become the norm. Meyer designed custom furniture for the home of Fritz Wichert. The Fucker brothers sold models to the then young scholar Richard Krautheimer, works that remained in his possession throughout his travels and life. Rudloff moved to in Höhenblick, where he lived and worked in a home furnished with his own models. Cetto designed the convertible dining table and chairs for May’s house. For the nursery in the Eisenmann home, Fritz Nathan made a group of playful, stacked-box storage units with linoleum surfaces in multiple colors.

These private commissions produced works that in photographs, at least, are virtually indistinguishable from the mass-produced models—Cetto’s dining table with its swiveling top and varnished wood is distinctive in these features, but identical in form to mass-produced models. And yet, the premium on aestheticizing Gebrauchsmöbel was growing. In 1929, the Kunstschule hosted a version of the travelling exhibit Der Stuhl (The Chair). The original exhibit
contained a core group of chairs assembled by the Württemberg State Commerce Office; in subsequent venues, each locale supplemented these with works by local manufacturers and designers. The stipulation was that any additional model should be not just unusual, but really modern, contemporary models,” and should be mass-produced. First in Stuttgart, then in Frankfurt, Berlin, and Dresden, each city presented designs from its locale. The show included generic chairs and ones by named designers: Thonet chairs sat beside others by Mies, Rietveld, Le Corbusier, and Breuer, and these next to an American office chair, stackable Paris café chairs, and a dentist’s chair.

In Frankfurt, money was tight, and only the small rooms of the Lind Collection at the Kunstschule were available for the show. Wichert invited about a dozen firms to participate. Kramer, Schuster, and Stam made the chair selection, and theirs were also on view. Willi Baumeister’s students designed and made the placards and description cards. While the chairs were rather uncERemoniously lined up again the walls of the gallery, the surprising coup of Wichert’s show was his pairing of each chair with a modern painting. There were works by Baumeister, Léger, and Gris. An entire row of Mondrian’s paintings were positioned above versions of the Kragstuhl. (Figure 3.29)

The ninety chairs were manufacture by Hausrat, the Bauhaus, and Thonet, among others, and a dozen Frankfurt firms. Still, criticized for “neglecting” local chair makers—indeed, the carpenters tried to have the show closed—May’s office reiterated that the exhibition required the organizers choose modern examples. But for chair makers the show represented a substantial commercial opportunity. Visitors were invited to try the chairs out, and both the artwork and the chairs were for sale, the former through the Kunstschule, the latter through company catalogs. Chairs ranged in price from 5 to 1,045 marks (the dentist’s chair). Those made by major manufacturers, including Thonet, Holzindustrie Ettenheim, and Rockhausen Söhne, were the most economical at 5 to 14 marks each; the Bauhaus, Mies, Breuer, Kramer, and Wilhelm Knoll chairs, ranging from 35 to 105 marks were some of the most expensive, and certainly beyond the average working wage. The Hausrat chairs were also surprisingly costly: the cheapest Schuster chair was listed at 24 marks, but another at 48, his upholstered model, cost 130 marks.

The exhibit was well-attended and much discussed, although it is unlikely that conversation debated the rhetorical question posed by the exhibition: “Is there already a new chair? Is there seating for the range of contemporary use-needs [Gebrauchszwecke] that has evolved from new “will-to-form” and new production technology?” A message reflected by the headline in a local paper was more apt:...
“Ennobling the everyday, . . . how does one bring some culture into one’s life?”

After all, these Gebrauchsmöbel were on exhibit in an art gallery, not in a Hausrat showroom, and were juxtaposed to easel paintings. Were modern chairs due a new kind of veneration, like a painting? Or was it the other way around? Visitors sitting in these chairs, looking up at Mondrians, might have wondered whether it wasn’t the painting that had changed purpose, becoming perhaps a kind of Gebrauchsart. A “chair” theme issue of DNF featured the exhibition on the cover with a Leistikow-designed ad image for Thonet with New Woman, Erika Habermann, sitting in a Kramer chair. (Plate 4d)

An end to chaos

Already in my youth, I had discovered that my mission was to battle the constructed chaos of the city and the countryside . . . .

—Franz Schuster, 1976

The term Gebrauchsmöbel implied an opposite “useless or unusable furniture;” superfluous furniture, in its narrow specificity or lack of a serious function, consumed space while providing little or no use value. The concept of uselessness was part of the ascetic and priggish tenor of Neue Sachlichkeit polemics; the rejection of bourgeois luxury producing a prideful claim to efficiency, simplicity and hygienic purity.

The architect, Franz Schuster, exemplified this posture. Having attended the Vienna Kunstgewerbeschule (Arts and Crafts School) between 1913–1916, Schuster followed Tessenow to Hellerau, and worked there for six years on projects in Vienna and Dresden. In 1926, he co-authored an article, “Proletarische Architektur” with Franz Schacherl, and co-edited the journal, Der Aufbau, Österreichische Monatshefte für Siedlung und Städtebau (Structure. Austrian Monthly for Settlement and Urban Design). May was on the editorial board. The journal ran for a brief twelve issues, from January through December 1926; in early 1927 Schuster left for Frankfurt to join May’s design team.

Schuster was a serious, if predictable polemicist. He defined his terrain as the reform of domestic culture through the design of standardized housing and its appurtenances. His most persistent theme was the threatening chaos of contemporary life, a kind of viral menace to which he responded as an ardent hygienist. In calling for ridding society of the ballast of previous centuries, he said, “A part of looking after our souls is getting rid of dead things.” Schuster combined a humanist’s reaction to rapid urbanization, with a classicist’s desire for
order and clarity. He espoused familiar themes—that speculators had no thought for consistency or clarity of purpose, and that, as the pace of life quickened, disorder was on the rise—with a particular insistence in frequent and didactic publications, including *Eine Eingerichtete Kleinstwohnung* (*An Outfitted Minimal Dwelling*, 1927), *Ein Möbelbuch* (*A Furniture Book*, 1929). As a designer, the profound simplicity of his work could border on barrenness, underscoring the contradiction between a Hans Beckmann, whose artistic endeavors uncovered the turbulence of modernity, and modernists who strove to find its antidote.198

In 1929, in *Ein Möbelbuch*, Schuster analyzed the household in daily and evolutionary flux.199 The slender volume was akin the rulebook of an order, with the same passion for reductive forms that Schwagenscheidt had for sunlight:

> Objective form is not a sign of poverty. The thoroughly researched, lucidly designed, simple form is the source for a new wealth of forms. The comparison could be made with organic elements. From four basic materials—hydrogen, H, oxygen, O, nitrogen, N, and carbon, C—all the myriad animal and plant forms are made.200

Schuster’s new wealth of forms, as outlined here, was “constructible furniture” ("Aufbaumöbel"), *Gebrauchsmöbel* transposed into a modular system. (Figures 3.30-31) His twelve modules of four primary forms, each in three versions, were not in and of themselves furniture, but from them one could assemble one hundred different items including storage cabinets, shelving, desks, and wardrobes.
The simple cubes, some with shelves or doors, were oak, finished with a light or dark varnish, or color enamel. They could be mass-produced by unskilled laborers. Writing in *Hausrat*, the critic Gustav Lehmann called Aufbaumöbel “the most mature contemporary furniture system possible. . . . This small book is a document of our time,” introducing furniture of a “noble simplicity, the highest practicality, with sparing form and a pleasing aspect . . . .”

Advertised in *DNF* as “settlement furniture” (“Siedlungsmöbel”), the line was sold at the downtown department store. Schuster offered a model kit for making three-dimensional, paper models of the pieces to try various room layouts. By this time, he had assumed a position at the Frankfurt office of the DGG, then under Hans Kampffmeyer’s direction. His title was head of the Housing Advisory Office. In 1932, he set up a showroom at the newly-opened DGG settlement of Tornow-Gelände, where tenants could get free consultations on the best, most efficient way to outfit and furnish their units. Schuster had success with his line beyond the New Frankfurt, seeing it produced in Germany, then patented in England, and sold throughout the 1930s in Sweden. Although he had proposed that the simplicity of the line would make it affordable to those of modest means, its ultimate market was among middle-income purchasers.

The film *Die Frankfurter Kleinstwohnung*, and Lihotzky and Schuster’s modular furniture each demonstrated how modern furniture was universal and interchangeable. In its generic quality, the new furniture was classless and demo-
cratic, representing a kind of neutrality in household culture akin to the concept of internationalism in architecture. “It must be apparent that we do not distinguish working- or middle-class principles, but part of one and part of the other,” proclaimed Walter and Grete Dexel in *The House of Today*. “The only difference now is between old and new . . .”

Schuster’s modular furniture comprised two numbers in the Frankfurt Register. In the matter of furniture, May said the Register’s purpose was to lead the way to “good and price-worthy” items. Co-editor, Joseph Gantner, thought it was the best mass-produced furniture for the modern house. Indeed, the Register was offered in the same spirit as Lihotzky’s proposed consumer information service, but without its scope. Two numbers were devoted to Thonet chairs, including some models by Kramer; unattributed, Brenner’s Frankfurt Bed was also included. (Figures 3.32–33) There were luxury items, including a telephone designed by Fulda, and stainless ware by Solingen. Only a few item were listed with prices, principally the chairs and lights. Some of them were affordable, beginning at 11 marks, the lights were uniformly expensive, the cheapest at 25 marks, equivalent to half a month’s rent in a minimal dwelling. Register item manufacturers included some Frankfurt firms, like Bamberger, Leroi & Co., that produced the Frankfurt *Sitzbad*, and Richard Franke, maker of the Dell lamps. Altogether, the list had no particular audience from either the production or consumption end: the objects were mostly too expensive for those living in settlement housing, and did not represent a balanced array of the products necessary to equip a household. Indeed, with objects like the telephone and stainless tableware (the latter included only serving utensils and a sauté pan), it verged on the arbitrary. Rather the list seems to have been assembled according to what the editors deemed good products, with no striving for comprehensivity or balance in other terms. It did, though, exemplify principle New Frankfurt virtues—of collaboration, standardization, and an assessment of quality based on the principles of rationalization.

The January 1928 issue of *DNF* was devoted to furniture. It was largely a polemical undertaking. Articles by Breuer and Le Corbusier set those by Kramer and Schuster in a stellar context. Breuer made the case that “metal furniture was nothing other than the necessary apparatus of contemporary life.” In “Luxury or Comfort?” Behne asserted that “our forefathers” “built not for living, but for the reign of art; not in service to people, but in service of ideal form.” History was silent as to how well buildings worked, focusing only on style and ornamentation, with hardly a floor plan in evidence. In fact, the inhabitants of great palaces lived in luxury, but not in comfort. In these short paragraphs, Behne
argued thinly, polemically, and illogically, still asserting that architecture now addressed its proper task: suiting the everyday in its practical and homely purposes. The argument made by May and others, that the vernacular provided both the method and goal of good design, was irrelevant to Behne. He posed an existential problem: “how to live.” Form was an instrument that liberated a natural instinct to live free, without constraint: “that is something new.” Here, he put the argument in bourgeois, “consumer” terms of freedom and spirit, rather than rationalist’s rents, floor plans, and limitations. Kramer continued in this vein in “Individual or Standardized Furniture?” stating that vernacular design shaped a pre-modern kind of comfort, while the contemporary condition was transformed by electricity and central heating. He claimed for standardized furniture, not only comfort, but also an aesthetic, a new visual pleasure.

Late in 1928, scandal rocked Hausrat GmBH. The director had squandered money on meals and travel, but mostly on drink. There were reports of his drunken escapades in outlying towns with Hausrat shops. Landmann cautioned that the future of Hausrat was threatened. The director was charged with fraud, and dismissed; May washed his hands of the matter. But in March, 1929, the KP reignited the scandal, charging that, under May’s direction, Hausrat had dismissed a number of low-level employees while hiring the now disgraced manager at a salary of 14,000 marks per year—equal to 10 percent of the company profits—and gave him use of a car. May’s office explained that to save money they had closed offices and shops in Giessen, Höchst, and Braubacherstrasse, Marburg, Etzlar, and Siegen, and dismissed some lower level staff. And having centralized the offices meanwhile, a car was an efficient way for the manager to move among offices in dispersed locations. At the least, May’s actions showed a lack of political savvy. In October, as the economic crisis deepened, Aschenbrenner (CP) was still citing the Hausrat case, tying the disappearance of municipal funds with such “wanton expenditures.” Hausrat, an institution intended to provide poor relief, was ”a topic that always revealed swindles, cheats, and dirty business.” The demise of Hausrat GmbH was inevitable even without the controversies. Of the original ten locations, only the shop on Paulsplatz, and in Offenbach, Wiesbaden and Mainz remained, and their managers had salary reductions of 20 percent. Even these measures were not enough to rescue Hausrat from its losses and the new higher interest rates on its debt. It was liquidated on January 14, 1930.
Notes

1 EM, “Mittelstandshaus,”143 (see chapter 2, n. 58).
4 August Bebel’s Die Frau und der Sozialismus (1891) argued social and political equality for women, but failed to alter party policy. Indeed, socialist Edmund Fischer’s Die Frauenfrage (1905) argued that his proposals for communal nurseries and kitchens sanctioned women’s abandonment of duty. SDP policy was for improved wages for men, which would also allow women to quit their jobs, and strengthen the socialist family by being at home.
5 Barbara Aschoff-Greven, Die bürgerliche Frauenbewegung in Deutschland, 1894–1933 (Göttingen: Vandenhoec & Ruprecht, 1981); Ute Frevert, Women in German History. From Bourgeois Emancipation to Sexual Liberation (New York: St. Martin’s, 1989); Emrich, Demokraten, 38, 46; Maly, Regiment; Toni Sender, Autobiography of a German Rebel (New York, 1939); Max Oppenheimer, Das kämpferische Leben der Johanna Kirchner (Frankfurt, 1974).
7 Schäfer, Schulen und Schulpolitik, 157.
9 The greatest increase in the number of women working women was a 300 percent jump between the 1880s and 1907. Although many observers predicted the destruction of family life, government programs to reverse the trend were not implemented until after WWI. Robyn Dasey, “Women’s Work and the Family: Women Garment Workers in Berlin and Hamburg Before the First World War,” The German Family, 222. On working women in Frankfurt see Päh, Frankfurter Arbeiterbewegung, volume II, 1118ff.
10 Women first enrolled in German universities in 1900; by 1910, they numbered 1,867. By the end of WWI, they had moved into the professional fields of dentistry, political science and law, and comprised a large portion of the student population. At some universities they were the majority. In the post-war years, the number quickly declined. By 1930, it was near pre-war level at 10 percent. Hugh W. Puckett, Germany’s Women Go Forward (New York: Columbia University, 1930), 200–01.
13 Puckett, Germany’s Women, 192–95.

15 Policymakers used statistical data to assume that marriage would insure women’s voluntary withdrawal from the labor market: in Berlin before the war only 11 percent of married women worked full-time, whereas 70 percent of single women, and 45 percent of widowed women did. Experts often overlooked the realities of modern industrial life, which could require several incomes to support the family. Dasey, “Women’s Work and the Family,” 223.

16 The concept of woman’s sphere evolved in reaction to the freedoms called for by the Rousseauan Enlightenment. Separate spheres were defined in terms of Geschlechtscharakter (sexual character), the mental characteristics believed coincident with physiological difference. In the twentieth century, under the influence scientific and medical theories, the concept was accepted fact. In 1904, a typical German encyclopedia defined Geschlechtscharakter as consisting “in the female, as emotion and sensibility, in the male, as intelligence and rational thought.” Karin Hausen, “Family and Role-Division: The Polarisation of Sexual Stereotypes in the Nineteenth Century—An Aspect of the Dissociation of Work and Family Life,” in Evans, German Family, 51–53.

17 Noever, *Schütte-Lihotzky*, 75, citing a report to the city council on March 31, 1926.

18 E. Koch to the magistrate (21 November 1929), PHRW MA.


24 Bridenthal, “‘Professional,’” 153–73; Frevert, *Women in German History*, 168–204.


27 See chapter 6 for Lihotzky’s participation in the exhibition.


31 Lincke, “Wohnungsbau,” 607. RKW director Siemens argued the same for the nation as a whole, and the need to “educate the German consumer” to accept the benefits but personal limitations of mass-produced goods. Shearer, “Reichskuratorium,” 598 (see chap. 2, n.10).

32 Lincke, “Wohnungsbau,” 607

33 Among her many activities on behalf of working women, Bittorf initiated an adult education school for maids, the Fortbildungsschule für Hausangestellte, on Löwengasse in the heart of Bornheimer Hang, with the goal of the “social uplifting” of women’s “professions.” Helga Baumann-Spitta, “Die ersten weiblichen Stadtverordneten im Frankfurt der Weimarer Republik,” FrauenStadtGeschichte, 181–82. Although a conservative, school principal and city councilor, Christine Lill (ZP), was banned from her profession in 1933; was arrested by the Gestapo, and narrowly missed internment in a concentration camp. She died of illness in 1945. Henny Pleimes (DNVP, later NSDAP) became a successful author on völkisch culture and language.


38 Walter and Grete Dexel, Das Wohnhaus von Heute (Leipzig: Hesse and Becker Verlag, 1928); Erna Meyer, Der neue Haushalt (Stuttgart: 1926); Ludwig Neundörfer, So wollen wir wohnen (Stuttgart: Franckische Verlagshandlung, 1931); Bruno Taut, Die neue Wohnung. Die Frau als Schöpferin (Leipzig: Verlag Klinkhardt and Burmann, 1928).


44 Letter from the Siedlungs-Wohnungs- and Baugilde Österreichs, file “Kochnischen und Spülkücheneinrichtung” (1923), no. 28, MSLN.

45 Noever, Schütte-Lihotzky, 97–98.


47 From 1925 to 1927, Lilly Reich was the coordinator of the annual Werkbund Exhibition at the Frankfurter Messe. Kramer remembered her bringing the latest design debates to the
attention of other young exhibitors. Ferdinand Kramer, interview with the author, Frankfurt (22 June 1984).


49 Rukschcio, *Adolf Loos*, 244.


55 There are many precedents for the particulars of the Frankfurt Kitchen. Both the wooden plate holder and the sink with a built in drain shelf appear in Hermann Muthesius’s *Das englische Haus* (1904): figs. 169, 170.

56 “Frankfurter Küche war ein Umsturz,” 21.

57 “Die elektrische Römerstadt.” Clipping, “Neuzeitliche Wohnungen,” #185, NGSL.


59 Others of her works show the influence of Loos. The unexecuted Dr. Strasburger House (1928) designed in partnership with Wilhelm Schütte recalls the Scheu House (1912). Noever, *Schütte-Lihotzky*, 116.

60 Kramer, “Biografie/Biography,” 165.


63 Erna Meyer, who curated the “Siedlung und Wohnungen” section of the Werkbund Exhibition, believed that the kitchen niche with fixed furnishings was impractical. She favored a loose arrangement of equipment around a square room, as in the kitchen she and J.J.P. Oud designed for the Stuttgart Werkbund Exhibition. It appears in nearly every publication on the kitchen after 1927. Erna Meyer, “Probleme der Küchengestaltung,” *BZ* (10 December 1927): 449–50; Meyer, “Wohnungsbau und Hausführung,” 89–95.

64 Catharine Beecher had also admired the commercial kitchen: “The cook’s galley in a steamship has every article and utensil used in cooking for two hundred persons, in a space not larger
than this stove, room and so arranged that with one or two steps the cook can reach all he uses.” Beecher, *American Woman’s Home*, 33. There are other parallels between Beecher’s and Lihotzky’s kitchens: “The flour-barrel just fills the closet, which has a door for admission and a lid to raise when used. . . . On the other side next the sink, to hold the dishes, and grooves cut to let the water drain into the sink.” Ibid., 35.


67 Historical data for the firms Haarer and Grumbach is scant. Georg Grumbach was apparently a master carpenter. “Dignified and respected” was the characterization given him in a history of the restoration of Peterskirche in Frankfurt in 1895. In 1905, both firms provided wood and metal cabinetry for Frankfurt’s Israeli Hospital, suggesting their early expertise in hygienic storage units later adapted for kitchen use. Both firms appear to have shut down before WWII’s end. Friedrich Wilhelm Battenberg, *Die alte und die neue Peterskirche zu Frankfurt am Main* (Frankfurt: Kesselringsche Hofbuchhandlung, 1895); Festschrift zur Einweihung des neuen Krankenhauses der Israelitischen Gemeinde zur Frankfurt am Main (Frankfurt: J. Kauffmann, 1914), 66.


69 The “Kochkiste” was a homely slow cooker, apparently of local origin.

70 “Die Frankfurter Küche,” Film Museum Archive, Frankfurt.


72 See chapter 6.


74 “Das Programm Loucheur,” *DNF*, no. 9 (1928): 161; Kramer, “Rationalisierung des Haushaltes,” 83. The French government suspended negotiations for the kitchen in 1929 when the intention to credit payment to a reparations account was called into question. “Frankfurter Normenbauteile für Frankreich,” *DNF*, no. 1 (1929).


76 Neundörfer, *So wollen*, 55–56. Reformers, including Lihotzky, disapproved of children in poor neighborhoods playing in the street. In the “modern” household, mothers supervised their children from their workstations; kitchens and laundries overlooked play areas, inside and out. The play areas, in turn, were largely private. Mothers, absent nannies and nursery maids, were the primary caregivers, and reformers charged them with being intent on play as a form of child development. Lihotzky, “What is being?” 152.


Rades, Frankfurt am Main, Die Goethestadt, 80.


Grete Schütte-Lihotzky, “What is being done for the Women and Children in the new Residential Quarters and Colonies?” Wohnen und Bauen (July/August 1930): 158.

While the cheapest iron was 8 marks, a coffee maker was a relatively dear 30, and a washing machine 330. The vacuum cost 90 marks. Meyer, Der Neue Haushalt, figures reprinted from the 23rd edition in n.a., “Elektrizität in der Wohnung,” Die Bauzeitung XXIV, no. 49 (10 December 1927), 450–52. This article provides a detailed roster of electric appliances, including some forgotten items like the electric dish cupboard ventilator, the cork-insulated vacuum (to reduce noise), and a stove that combined cheaper nighttime electricity with slow-cooking with electric burners for daytime use.


“Aktiengesellschaft für kleine Wohnungen zu Frankfurt am Main” (January 1–December 31, 1927), pamphlet, ABG papers, StVVA, 455.

Päch, Arbeiterbewegung II, 1116–17.


Rades, Frankfurt, 102–03.


The apartment blocks built in the 1928 apparently had gas stoves. It was hoped that central heating would be retrofitted.


DNF, no. 1 (1928), advertising section.

Advertisement, WMB, no. 3 (1928), xxxvii.

“Umbau der Frankfurter Gasgesellschaft,” 83.

Wilhelm Schütte, “Vom neuen Bauen in Frankfurt am Main: Das Wohnungsprogramm,” BW (1927), 118.

Dr. Schmude, “Der Streit um die elektrische Küche” FGA (16 Oct. 1928); Interressengemeinschaft ‘Römerstadt,’ “Siedlung ‘in der Römerstadt” (31 December 1928), MA.

Followed so soon by the depression, the record cold of the 1928/29 winter could not have come at a worse time, either for the New Frankfurt initiative, nor for the population.

Interressengemeinschaft ‘Römerstadt.’

“Objektivität keine Interesse,” FN (7 June 1929).


“Überricht vom Wohnung,” 9–11.

Document (4 August 1931), WEG Amt.

Schütte-Lihotzky, “What is being?” 158.

Lihotzky also envisioned that the laundry she designed, but was not built, would provide service to the Praunheim kindergarten. See chapter 6.


See chapter 6 for a discussion of the Altersheim.

Ferdinand Kramer Werkkatalog, nos. 108–12.

“Wie fühlen sich die Siedler in Westhausen?” FZ (9 September 1930).


“Ibid., EM to Landmann (15 November 1928). Leif Jerram cites a report by Munich researchers studying the laundry in Frankfurt. “The Frankfurt women complained . . . that the laundry charges were an irritation, as many families did not have enough clothes to make weekly laundry worthwhile. It also meant they had to walk through the snow to the wash house, and it took away a substantial source of income from ‘taking in,’ which enabled many women not to have to work outside the home.” The date of the report, 1926, is puzzling. The Bruchfeldstrasse laundry may have just been opened, but not long enough for the level of experience reflected here. The outlying settlement laundries, as far as records show, charged a per-use fee only. Did the report refer to older projects? “Bericht über die Reise der Mitglieder der Stadtratskommission beim Wohnungsamt nach Nürnberg und Frankfurt-am-M vom 22.–24. November 1926,” cited in Leif Jerram, “From Page to Policy: Camillo Sitte and Planning Practice in Munich,” Manchester Papers in Economic and Social History, no. 57 (September 2007).

Residents of Praunheim II (24 January 1930); (1 February 1930); Magistrate to resident W. Schwitzer (1 February 1930), Praunheim, MA.

Volker Rödel, Fabrikanarchitektur in Frankfurt am Main, 1174–1924 (Frankfurt: Societäts Verlag, 1984), 482, 489; Risse, Moderne, 124.


Meyer averred that the building suffered serious consequences as the result of faulty structural
analyses performed by the engineering firm on the job. Wilhelm, *Gropius*, 107–11.

124 Adolf Meyer, memorandum (23 July 1927), MA 650 X. May agreed; see, EM, no title, *FZ* (1 January 1927), clipping file, S2, EM, PA.


127 “Schaltanlage 5 und 6 des Städtischen Elektrizitätswerkes,” *DNF*, no. 1 (1929): 14–15. Cetto designed the transformer stations at Ostpark, Norden, Sachsenhausen and Eschersheim. Eugen Blanck, friends with Elisabeth Hase, had her photograph the stations for his personal archive. Cetto to Alice Day, typescript (18 November 1927), MCG; photographs, box 9, nos. 419 007, 419 009–13, –15, MCD; photographs, box 10 and 11, nos. 110, 112, S1/177, EBN; Cetto to Giedion (26 June 1931), MCG.

128 E. Hase, photographs, box 113, S1/177, EBN.


133 The Kappe complex had red metal-framed windows set in plain concrete, creating “an excellent color harmony.” Their Hannover Paper Factory (1923) is also instructive.


137 *FZ* (14 April 1929).

138 Adopting the “gebrauchs” prefix might have come from Max Cetto who had ties to the Hindemith circle.

139 Today’s usage is a “knock-about” car. There are many other words that have the prefix, that are not part of this set of cultural neologisms, for example, *Gebrauchsartikel*, article of daily use; *Gebrauchsdosis*, usual dose; *Gebrauchsmuster*(zeichnung), drawing or model. Walter Gropius,


143 Politics and the economy would mitigate against their vision. In 1929, under pressure from the city council, and circumstances similar to those of the Grossmarkthalle GmbH, Landmann liquidated the Fair Corporation.

144 See chapter 7.

145 Hausrat also received funding from the community chest, and the carpenter and upholsterer’s unions.

146 “Die Städtische Arbeitszentrale im Wort und Bild,” pamphlet, 1926, file “Arbeitszentrale für Erwerbsbeschränkte,” #104, ISGF.

147 File Hausrat, GmbH, 1918–1939 (18 March 1918), §1.897, StVVA.

148 Memorandum (9 June 1920), file “Arbeitszentrale für Erwerbsbeschränkte,” no. 7, ISGF.

149 Hausrat Annual Report (March 1921), ISGF.

150 The Budge Foundation also funded the Altersheim, design by Mart Stam. See chapter 6.

151 Hausrat also opened offices and stores in Offenbach, Marburg, Etzlar, Wiegen, Mannheim and Worms.

152 Hausrat, memorandum (20 August 1928), ISGF.

153 EM to Ludwig Landmann (10 April 1926, and 1 May 1926), Hausrat, ISGF.

154 Minutes (26 August 1924), # 612, StVVA, 498–500; Max Michel and Coustol, Hausrat business reports for 1926, 1927 (5 April 1927), Hausrat, §1.897, StVVA; ibid. (30 October 1930).

155 Paravicini (1872–1926) taught at the Frankfurt Kunstschule and designed a rural settlement in Bonames in 1918. His work was published in Bruno Taut’s *Der neue Wohnbau* (1927).

156 “Bericht über die Nachprüfung der Anklagen der ‘Hausrat’ GmbH gegen die Arbeitszentrale,” typescript (27 March 1926), file “Arbeitszentrale für Erwerbsbeschränkte,” #104, ISGF.


158 Memorandum, Lihotzky to the Magistrate (10 March 1927), Hausrat, §1.897 StVVA.

159 See chapter 9, pp. 574-55.

160 Grete Lihotzky, “Program für eine Beratungsstelle für Wohnungseinrichtung” (December 1929), MSLN.

161 Annual report, survey of Hausrat customers in 1921 (March 1922), ISGF.

162 Max Michel and Coustol, Hausrat business reports.


164 Competition announcement, *FZ* (25 July 1925). The competition jury comprised Landmann, Wichert, city councilor Lion, magistrate Max Michel, Carl Coustol, Professor von Loehr, Otto Ernst Sutter, Landeshauptmann from Wiesbaden, Dr. Woell, and Frankfurt architect and furniture designer Willy Schreiber.
May first met Kramer in 1924, at an exhibit of Kramer’s designs for the travel agency Hapag (Hamburg-America Linie, Reisebüro) Frankfurt offices. May had read a review critical of Kramer’s modernism, which had piqued his interest. In 1926, Kramer also fielded an offer to work for Tessenow. He chose Frankfurt. Ferdinand Kramer interview; Lore Kramer interview with the author (1 December 2003); Ferdinand Kramer Werkkatalog, nos. 1–2.

File “Arbeitszentrale für Erwerbsbeschrankte,” no. 109, ISGF.

Beginning publication in 1925, Hausrat was the bi-monthly journal of the national organization of Hausrat societies, the Union of Associated German Household Furnishing Societies (Verband der Gemeinnützigen Deutschen Hausratgesellschaften e. V.), Rähnitz-Hellerau, Dresden.

DNF, no. 1 (1928), advertising section.


Hausrat 5, no. 3 (1929); Hausrat, annual report (1927), StrVVA.


Minutes (28 August 1928), STVVA: 1033.

Budget approval, Asch to EM (19 July 1929), MA, Westhausen. Asch’s other cost-cutting proposals included the substitution of concrete for wooden steps down to the cellars.


Typescript, stamped by the Frankfurt Hochbaumat Division T, 1930, file 87, GSLN.

Müller-Wulckow, Architektur IV, 51, 75. After the Fascists revoked Wiehl’s license, he worked for other firms, including architect Ernst Balser. Wiehl took a teaching post in Stuttgart after the war. Ibid., 28, 44, 45, 72.

Erich Fromm, The Working Class in Weimar Germany. A Psychological and Sociological Study (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 126–35. Fromm surveyed the beliefs and attitudes of Frankfurt workers between 1929 and 1931 while at the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research. Those specifying their homes had no decoration numbered around thirteen percent, but included those who said they had no money for ornaments.


In the inflation years, rental housing was in great demand; the income from subdividing allowed many families to keep their houses. The sub-letters were high on the qualifying list for housing in the new settlements. For the middle class, the loss of this clientele was something of a debacle and another of the festering resentments against the New Frankfurt initiative that blossomed in the early 1930s.
Building Culture

185 “Adolf Meyer,” *DNF*, no. 9 (1929).
186 Thanks to Patricia Waddy for this information.
187 One of their furnished rooms was published in Müller-Wulckow, *Architektur*, IV, 44. Theodor Adorno, an acquaintance of Kramer’s, came from a prosperous Frankfurt family. With Adorno’s recommendation, Kramer designed the furnishings for the New School for Social Research in New York in the 1950s. Adorno’s nephew, meanwhile, moved into number 114 am Burgfeld in Römerstadt; the Frankfurt kitchen now on exhibit at the German National Museum in Nuremberg comes from his home. Adorno visited the house in the 1950s.
188 The table and chairs are currently in the Römerstadt house of the Ernst May Gesellschaft.
189 Photograph, reel 24, FNLB.
190 Letter, various furniture makers to the magistracy (28 February 1929), S1752, ISGF.
191 Fritz Wichert to WKVb (19 March 1929), S1752, ISGF; Höpfner, “publikum,” 31–32.
192 “Der Stuhl,” exhibition catalog (March 1929).
193 Fritz Wichert to WKVb (19 March 1929).
194 Announcement, *DNF*, no. 1 (1929): 24; the chair theme issue is *DNF*, no. 2 (1929).
195 *Franz Schuster*, 52.
198 As the pupil of Heinrich Tessenow, Schuster’s sympathies had strong ties to classical idealism.
200 Ibid., 7.
202 The table and the designs are Lihotzky’s. Drawings, file 60, MSLN.
204 *Franz Schuster*, 40.
205 Dexel, *Das Wohnhaus von Heute*, 137–38.
208 *DNF* (1928).
211 Ibid., 7.
212 Kramer, “Individuelle?” 8–11.
213 Memorandum from Siegen, Landmann to the board of the Hausrat, EM margin signature (10 December 1928), Hausrat, §1.897, StVVA.
214 Report (21 January 1929), Hausrat, §1.897, StVVA.
215 Memorandum (16 March 1929), Hausrat, §1, 897, StVVA.
216 Memorandum (21 October 1930), Hausrat, §1.251, StVVA 967.
217 Report (11 November 1930), Hausrat, §1.897, StVVA.
218 Report (12 December 1929), 323 III, MA; annual report, Hausrat, §1.897, StVVA.